



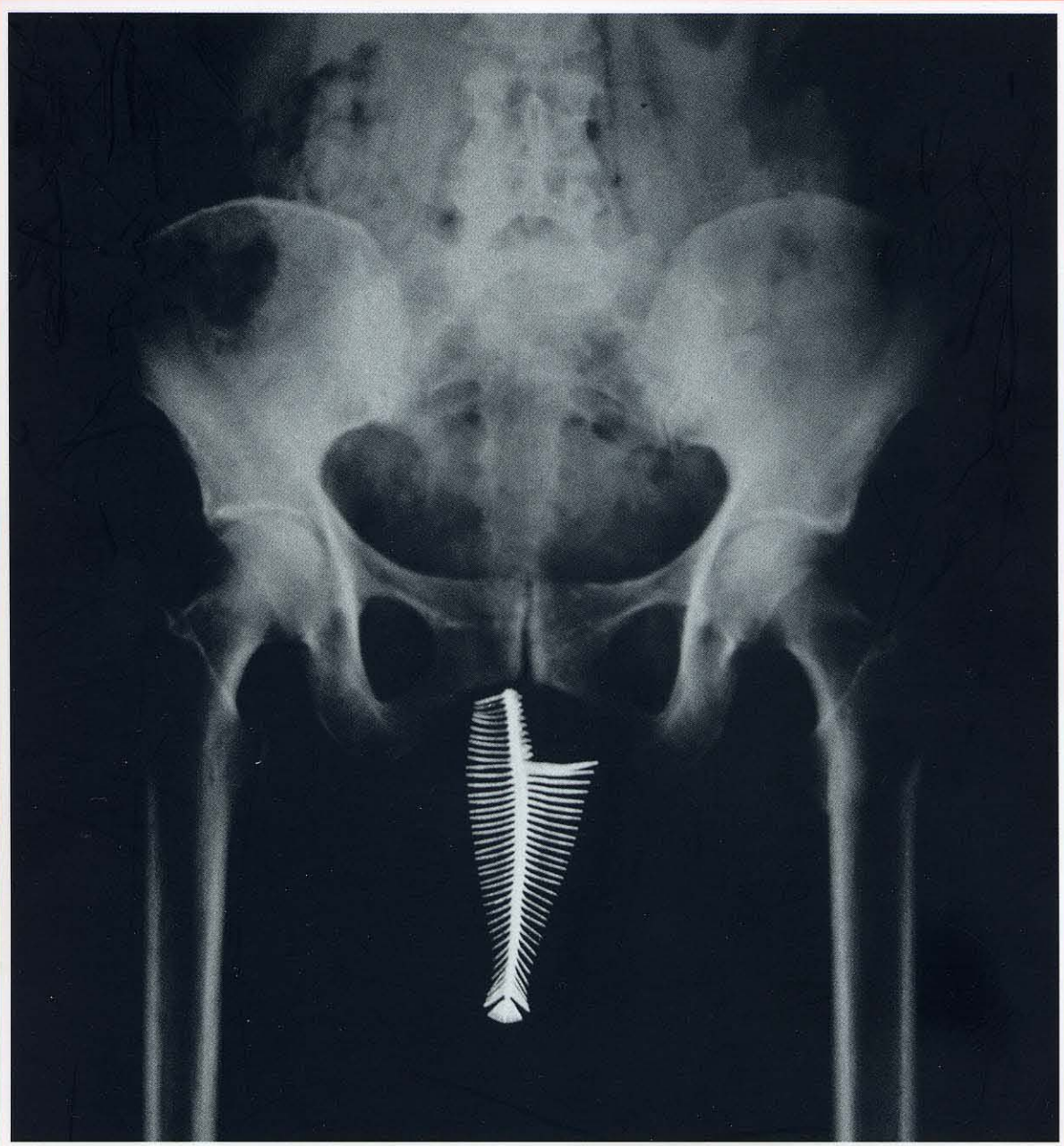
variant

Issue 12 Summer/Fall 1992 UK £3.50 US\$10

Can \$10.95 IR £4.00

HARRY MATHEWS *interview*

Women and Visual Pleasure *Extremes in Art East/West*



Plus: *New 57 Edinburgh, NY Sound Factory, Free Music in Berlin*
Reviews: *Printer Matter/New Art/Audio/Comics/Media*

Variant Summer/Fall 1992 Issue 12



SCOTTISH POWER



Variant is a magazine of cross-currents in culture: art practice, media, video, film, television, music, technology, critical thinking, interventions, independent tendencies. We are a charitable project and publish four times a year with the assistance of grants, advertising and sales. Most items are commissioned, but we welcome contributions and ideas for news items, reviews, articles, interviews and polemical writing. Guide-lines for writers are available. We also welcome submissions for artists/visual pages and for items which we can distribute via insertion: stickers, xerox work, prints, ephemera. Please include an SAE for speedy response.

Deadline for issue 13:
September 11th (Contributions)
September 30th (Advertising)

To advertise call 041 221 6380.
Rates for B&W and Colour available.

Subscriptions for four issues are:
£14 (individuals) and £20 (institutions).

ISSN 0-954-8815

EDITORIAL ADDRESS:

Variant
73 Robertson Street
Glasgow G2 8QD
Scotland

Tel (041) 221 6380
Fax (041) 221 7775

Editor: Malcolm Dickson

Assisted by: Ed Baxter, Billy Clark, Sara Samson

Design, Layout & Setting: Adrian Tyler
with assistance from Edward Smart
Advertising: Craig Richardson

Opinions expressed in Variant are those of the writers and not necessarily those of the editor of Variant.

All material is copyright Variant and the authors.

Printed by: Petersons, Tyne-and-Wear (091 456 3493)

Typesetting: Variant

Distribution: Scotland: Variant

Rest of UK: Central Books (081 986 4845)

Mail Order and Overseas: AK Distribution (031 667 1507)

Counter-Productions (081 274 9009)

Cover photo by Naomi Salaman

Inside front and back cover by Prolific Pamphleteer

ERROR: Issue 11

In issue 11 we should have credited Craig Richardson with the advertising slogan and not Ed Baxter, Ken Gill and Billy Clark, who did in fact assist with production. Fields and Frames should have been credited for supplying most of the information for the festival calendar. The cover and back images used in issue 11 were by Kathy Rogers, whose article 'Virtual Real Estate' appeared in that issue. We apologise to all the above.

Subsidised by the Scottish Arts Council

CONTENTS

8 Editorial

10 News

Insight

13 Free Music in Berlin (Bert Noglic)

14 Edge 92 (Ronnie Kael)

16 New York: The Sound Factory
(John Paul Jones)

18 The Curtain Rises (Roland Miller)

22 Harry Mathews Interview (Ed Baxter)

30 Women's Art Practice/
Man's Sex (Naomi Salaman)

36 Early Years of the 57
(Geraldene Prince)

Media

42 Ars Electronica (Clive Gillman)

43 One Minute TV (Nicky Hamlyn)

44 Recent European Festivals (Jane Rigby)

46 German Video Art 1976-1990
(Louise Crawford)

47 Sheffield Media Show (Alan McLean)

48 New Visions (Louise Crawford)

Audio

50 LMC Festival (Chris Blackford)

Print

52 File Under Popular (A.D.)

53 Improvisation (Jas Sherry)

Cultural Studies (Simon Brown)

55 Poll Tax Rebellion (Jim Ferguson)

56 Creatures Time Forgot (Jo McNamara)

57 Storming the Reality Studio
(Alan Robertson)

58 Technoculture (Richard Wright)

59 Book for the Unstable Media.

The Globalisation of High Technology
Production (Sean Cubitt)

60 Recent Comics (Grame Johnstone)

Projects

62 Recent Art in Glasgow (Craig Richardson) /
Edge 92 (Simon Grant)

Inside Front and Back Covers:
The Prolific Pamphleteer

News Items

Alex Fulton + Live Art Press

**No vote.
No voice.**

NO PAY TAX

Don't lose your right to vote

Your council will send you a form.

REGISTER NOW.

MAIDEN



Photo: Mark Simmons

Editorial

AT THE TIME OF PREPARING this issue, an unsolicited fax from an anonymous newspaper arrived concerning the collecting of news items by journalists banned from 'war zones'. It proposed that with the use of sophisticated recording techniques (incorporating the 'latest micro-chip technology'), these 'virtual journalists' could record the sounds of gunfire and ground explosions from the perimeter of the exclusion area which could estimate not only the intensity of the conflict, but also where the firing is coming from and in which direction it is aimed. Although not yet fully developed as an available technology, it is another reminder of how the development of technology and the increasing sophistication of modern warfare are interlinked.

What the above also suggests is that news received would be less likely to be based on real events and possibly more subject to manipulation. The *absence* of coverage serves the same misinforming purpose: the lack of comprehensive reportage on the war in the (former) Yugoslavian States conceals the reality of the horror visited upon citizens there and the history of the nationalist conflicts. The perils of transposing the free market economy to Eastern Europe, with the attendant poverty and repression that it entails has not and will not be an issue for discussion, since it would seem that the demise of 'communism' represents a triumph for the capitalist West. The endless attention on the UN relief convoys reinforces the role of a paternalistic aid that cloaks imperialism. The 'freedom of the press' is often no more than the selecting of appropriate items and calling it objective reporting, the voice of the people, the mirror on the world. Biases shape reporting. It should come as no surprise.

The recent riots in LA were an example of how the incidental recording of events can flare up the anger of thousands. The home video recording of white police beating up a black motorist burst the bubble that brutality by the forces of law and order is an occasional aberration. That news footage of the incident and the subsequent helicopter shots of LA in flames presented an unnerving backdrop to the increasing incidences in the UK of false imprisonment, infringements of civil rights, institutional racism and other miscarriages of justice. Parliamentary democracy is exposed as a fiction. In the case of LA, is it any wonder that insurgent moments arise when these wrongs are redressed by those who are on the receiving end of sustained violation?

Crises seem to affect contemporary societies in an ever escalating cycle - unhappiness in the West, moral dilemma's in the East, poverty in Africa and the Third World. "*Our civilisation*" stated Julia Kristeva on Channel 4's 'Talking Liberties', "*is experiencing something like a personal depression*". Rather than divert analysis into a false optimism, Kristeva advocates a negative diagnosis to the discontent of the times.

Scotland has its own fair share of neuroses. At the last General Election less than 20% of the population voted for the Conservatives. Since they were elected in 1979 they have privatised public services, attacked wages, working conditions, jobs and trades union rights to oppose such moves. Big business and the multinationals have eroded the infrastructures of entire communities with the sole aim of boosting private profit. It has been ceaseless and this much is clear from whatever side of the political fence you align yourself to: the Scottish economy is in ruins and the future for its citizens couldn't be any more bleak.

Such hopelessness, however, is not a source of despair but one of challenge. Somewhere in this issue it is suggested - albeit ironically - that it is now a question of settling down to another 5 years of Westminster. Yet there is no reason why we should. Look at what our elected representatives have done with the people's mandate - privatised health, transport (and intend to do the same with water), introduced the poll tax, the racist Asylum Bill, and the Child Support Act. That tactic of non-cooperation can also be used by people themselves when saying 'no more'. The platitudes, on the one hand, of the opposition on questions of a referendum on devolution or independence, and on the other, the dismissal of the

Tories with their accusations of a fortress mentality affecting Scotland, should both be tossed aside in favour of power at the local level. It is there that alignments are made with the international.

The situation is not without its contradictions: Scotland, like many other countries, is reactionary, especially for the disadvantaged. Also, despite an overwhelming rejection of the Tories *for the fourth time*, their voting base has increased. Nationalism as an ideology is reactionary and repressive, as events in Eastern Europe are proving. But there is a vibrant multi-cultural base for Scottish self-determination. It is quite legitimate to support change from a grassroots level upwards since all else continually fails where campaigns are led by bureaucrats and those with a vested interest in the management of change. To return to Kristeva's analogy with the suffering of depression, what is truly scunnering is remaining passive and silent in the face of systematic degradation and humiliation. That humility and degradation is echoed throughout the world in a thousand situations.

Like all endeavours attempting to survive in the contemporary marketplace of ideas and commodities, **Variant** circulates like many others with an alternative - yet non-definitive - version of socio-cultural practice. Culture, being a set of relations around various activities of a creative, social and educational inclination, is inevitably determined by the institutions of class, history, gender and race. Artistic practices touch and draw on a complex of interdependent factors (on the micro scale), shaped within wider social, cultural and political contexts (on the macro scale of society). Any attempt to steer the discussion of art away from our existence *in the world*, and all that impinges upon it - the imponderable and the matter-of-fact - is a complete waste of time.

This issue:

The 4 main articles in this issue are not cohesive in subject matter. Three of them carry their own introductions, but a few words of explanation should be made regarding the article on the New 57 Gallery. This is the first in a series of commissioned articles which explore some of the salient aspects of contemporary art in Scotland: what forces, institutions and ideas have shaped it. This series aims to address the neglected aspects of historical discontinuity, and provide speculative lineages which otherwise are not assumed in the current condition of amnesia. The articles will vary and be of mixed interest, naturally, from more challenging interpretations of the 'facts', to more conventional footnotes to history. They are not 'authoritative' in that any other number of notes can be made in the margins by readers empowered to cast a different light. We will throw the net wider than Scotland in future issues.

The 'Comments' section will continue to provide polemics on the machinations of administered culture. A new section titled 'Insights' has been introduced. This will present viewpoints from crevices around the globe on subjects concerning the 'real world' in a state of flux, subterranean or popular. Two contributions follow in this issue. Contributions to this and all other sections in the magazine are welcome. The design of Variant has also altered and will continue to refine itself in the future.

The interview with Genesis P. Orridge which was listed to appear in this issue will now appear in issue 13.

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Jo Spence.

Notes on Contributors

Ronnie Kael is a writer based in Tyneside/Bert Noglik is a writer based in Leipzig/John Paul Jones is a writer based in Paris/Geraldine Prince is an art historian and administrator based in Edinburgh/Roland Miller is an artist based in Sheffield/Naomi Salaman is an artist, working on the project *What She Wants*; a photographic exhibition of women's work looking at the male body, desire, and masculinity/Ed Baxter is a writer living in London/A.D. is a writer based in Stirling/Jas Sherry is a musician based in Glasgow/Jo MacNamara is a community arts administrator living in Edinburgh/Simon Brown is an arts worker and writer living in Glasgow/Sean Cubitt is a writer and lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies at Liverpool Polytechnic/Alan Robertson is a video maker and writer living in Glasgow/Jim Ferguson is a writer and poet living in Glasgow/Richard Wright is a writer living in London/Graham Johnstone is a comic artist based in Glasgow/Nicky Hamlyn is a writer based in East Sussex/Clive Gillman is an artist working in new media based in Liverpool/Louise Crawford is an artist and filmmaker based in Glasgow/Jane Rigby is an independent producer and co-Director of Fields and Frames based in Perthshire/Alan MacLean is an artist based in Sheffield/Chris Blackford is the editor of 'Rubberneck'/Simon Grant is a writer based in London/Craig Richardson is an artist based in Glasgow/Prolific Pamphleteer is an independent production company based in Oxford working on campaign and interventionist poster work.

N E W S



Projects UK and the Tyneside International Collaboration 1990. Photo Projection by Krzysztof Wodiczko

PROJECTS UK TO FOLD

After 10 years and amidst controversy and much rancour, **Projects UK** a mixed media arts organisation in Newcastle-upon-Tyne - is to close by the end of the financial year 1992/3.

Projects UK was established in 1983 by Jon Bewley and Ken Gill, who were part of an artists group in Newcastle-upon-Tyne called the Basement Group. The original idea was for an office based artists run organisation that created opportunities for artists to work in different media and contexts (see *Variant no.4, 1988*). It proved to be a success. Projects UK then became a department of Newcastle Media Workshops in the late '80s. Newcastle Media Workshops was a production facility with photographic darkrooms and sound studio and Projects UK was still independent. Eventually this three department organisation took the overall name of Projects UK.

Projects UK is best known for the activities of the artists' projects department. This department had a policy of commissioning new works by visual artists across many formats: posters, performances, installations, video, audio, multiples, etc. It created further opportunities for artists by organising international residencies and exchanges and established the largest archive in the UK of documentation (photo and video) of time based work.

Its closure is not due to a large financial deficit (although the organisation did have minor financial difficulties) but rather a confluence of circumstances that include (internally) poor management by the Trustees, resulting in a noticeable lack of morale and direction, and (externally) the strategic restructuring of the city's arts provision by Northern Arts.

The organisation, based in the controversial Newcastle Arts Centre, twice failed to appoint a Director and last year lost its annual grant from Newcastle City Council. In the light of this and the similar status of other arts facilities in the city, Northern Arts commissioned a report from consultants Francis/Powell to compare the efficiency and potential of visual arts activity against levels of investment. Amongst other things they recommended that Projects UK be fully wound up by April 1993. This has resulted in the sacking of the four remaining senior staff (department heads and marketing), with only a skeleton administrative staff remaining to oversee final programme commitments and its closure.

However, the Trustees recently convened an invitation only meeting attended by two senior Northern Arts Officers, John Bradshaw and Jenny Attala, in order to discuss how the organisation can still "contribute to the debate". It is no small cause of bitterness and frustration amongst artists and artworkers in Newcastle that the Trustees of an organisation, having sacked its

workers and apparently still retained its £150,000 revenue grant, can consider continuing programming (instead of quickly winding up) with Northern Arts approval.

It is thought that Northern Arts, as the recipient of Visual Arts Region 1996, consider that the events department of Projects UK (or its equivalent) an important element in their plans for 1996. The Francis/Powell report stated, *'The events programme [of Projects UK] has a strong national and international reputation for its innovative work in the areas of performance and events... [it] is an important contributor to Newcastle's reputation in the visual arts and a potential crucial component of VAR 1996. It is important that the work be properly supported.'* Peter Hewitt, the new Director of Northern Arts, has said, *"Projects UK will be a loss to the region and it is important that its place be properly filled. Northern Arts and its partners will be making every effort to ensure that this happens."*

It is certainly true that visual art provision in Newcastle is going through a radical but necessary restructuring at the moment and a number of key decisions and appointments are currently being - or about to be - made. It appears that although Projects UK is the most visible victim of this shakeout (there is particular concern over the fate of the archive), Northern Arts have been particularly supportive of the events department and it may not be the end of the

story. There are currently a number of alternative plans, all of which include a new building with new arts facilities: a contemporary collection, artists studios, exhibition space, etc. This may include a facility modelled on the success of the events department of Projects UK. On July 3rd, Northern Arts approved an award to Jon Bewley for the research towards the development of a new artists resource in the Northern Region. **Locus Plus** (or **Locus +**) will be a commissioning agency with specific responsibility for live art, time-based events and artists projects. Based in central Tyneside, it will begin programming from April '93. Further information from: Locus +, PO Box 1PE, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, NE99 1PE.

ALEX FULTON

DAVID MELLOR, MINISTER OF FUN

The political wheel of fortune, like the roulette wheel, favours the few. This year's General Election was seriously bad news for Nationalists, Socialists, and anyone else searching the horizon for a new dawn. We'd better settle down and get used to the permanence of conservatism, for at least another 5 years (or so as the climate dictates).

One new face in John Major's Cabinet is David Mellor, Secretary of State at the **Department of National Heritage**, Minister of Fun (he said, "*it is all going to be fun*" when he was given the job), or Minister of Culture, Sport and Antiquities.

The titles are not as daft as they sound. Other European countries have Ministers with Departments responsible for National Monuments (France), and it is not unknown (in Central Europe) to lump religion in with culture, a hangover from the atheist Marxist days. As sport is a National Religion here, the new Minister's brief is par for the course. The last time David Mellor was Minister for the Arts - he succeeded Richard Luce on July 23rd 1990, but lasted only a few months, to be replaced by Tim Renton - he was described as the man who would give the arts a higher profile. Renton, who slowed down the process of devolution of funding to the English regions that the Wilding

Report had advocated, but did little else, said of his Ministry, "*I find the subject such fun.*" Richard Luce came to Arts from the Foreign Office, Tim Renton had been a Tory Chief Whip, and David Mellor has served in the Home Office and the Treasury. Robert Key, the Minister's Parliamentary Secretary has come with him from the Treasury.

Apart from the elevation of the Minister for National Heritage into the Cabinet, about which David Mellor said in 1990 he was not so keen, the biggest change is the expected removal of Broadcasting from Home Office to Heritage. The Minister has said he will defend the BBC's right to criticise government.

One major issue occupying the new Minister is the National Lottery, intended to fund existing charities, and the football pools promoters who are worried that their operations will be affected. There is already a nationally administered Foundation for Sports and Art, to which the pools contribute £70m annually.

What will the new Minister actually do? So far, he has decided not to list major works of art - the National Heritage - which should be 'saved for the nation' instead of being sold abroad. But he has suggested that the government might find a way of financially helping impoverished owners who want to sell off the family heirlooms. David Mellor has also become involved - who hasn't? - in the scuffling around the press and the Royals. The question is, should there be legislation to curb press freedom? If the Minister for Fun is to control the media, would he also be expected to judge issues of censorship in the arts? From the big wheel to the slippery slope.

MORE ARTS STRATEGIES

The juggernauts roll on, **National Arts & Media Strategy** (NAMS) in England, **Arts for a New Century** in Scotland, and similar vehicles in Wales and Northern Ireland. It looks as though we might get not one, but four, fourteen, or even more arts charters by the year 2000.

Apart from the four regional strategies, from the four national Arts Councils, some of the ten English Regional Arts Boards are working out

their own responses, Yorkshire and Humberside for one. The North West Arts Board is being reorganised, less than six months after it was set up. Part of the problem is the neglected status of Merseyside, which formerly had its own Regional Arts Association, but is now merged with the Manchester-based North West Arts. Liverpool has an arts policy of its own, based on a broad definition of 'Cultural Industries'. Sheffield is developing one, which may embrace a narrower definition of Cultural Industries. This is the 'classic model', that gives priority to new technology, mass distribution, and market-based economics for cultural production. Interestingly, the latest (London) Arts Council's NAMS document casts doubt on arguments for this 'classic' definition of cultural industries. Birmingham City Council is also developing its own arts policy (another Charter?) perhaps because it finds the West Midlands Arts Board too parochial. It can't be easy to fit Simon Rattle and his international band into the same funding bag as a community arts group in rural Shropshire.

Northern Arts has spawned the idea of an Artists' Charter, which will emerge as part of the Northern (English) Region's 1996 tenure as standard bearer for the Visual Arts in 1996. This was the title that Glasgow failed to win, amidst recriminations about 'saboteurs' (unhappy artists) like Ian McCulloch, whose paintings were removed from the Royal Concert Hall by Pat Lally, then the Leader of Glasgow District Council's Labour Group. During that year, 1990, Neil Wallace, at that time Deputy Director of the Glasgow City of Culture Unit, issued a stern public warning to the writers and artists who were angrily flaunting the Workers' City banner in the City Council's face. '*If you want something changed get inside the tent and piss outwards, not the other way around*', or words to that effect.

Arts 2000, Glasgow: City of the Visual Arts 1996 won't happen. It was Chris Carrell's final act of consultancy before going from the city in the wake of the Third Eye collapse, back to England (Portsmouth in fact). A Scottish Government with its own Ministry of Culture won't happen - yet. Has it all been pissing in the wind?



The Salary of an MP is linked by a Resolution of the House of Commons to 89 percent of the maximum of the national pay scale of a Grade 6 civil servant. The current level of an MP's salary is £30,854 a year. MP's are also entitled to the following:

- an additional Costs Allowance of £10,786 a year for MP's not representing inner-London constituencies;
- a London Supplement of £1,222 a year for MP's representing inner-London constituencies;
- an Office Costs Allowance of £28,986 a year (plus 10 per cent for pension contributions of any staff employed);
- free postage within the UK on Parliamentary business;
- on standing down or failing to be re-elected following the dissolution of a Parliament, a resettlement grant of between 6 and 12 months salary, depending upon age and length of service;
- the option to participate in the Parliamentary Pension Scheme. Contributions are currently paid at the rate of 6 per cent of pay. Benefits accrue at the rate of 1/60th of salary for each year of reckonable service up to 19 July 1983 and 1/50th of salary thereafter;
- reimbursement of the costs of travel within the UK on Parliamentary business and/or motor mileage allowance if travel is undertaken by private car.

In addition provision now exists for MP's to take one trip per year on Parliamentary business to an Economic Community Institution. The cost of a return Business Class airfare for the journey is reimbursable on the assumption that the journey begins and ends at a London Airport and that the destination is Brussels, Luxembourg or Strasbourg. Two days subsistence at the corresponding Civil Service overnight rate is also payable.

The European Assembly (Pay and Pensions) Act 1979 determines that the salary payable to UK MEP's shall be the same as that paid to a Member of the UK Parliament (currently £30,854) except that, where an MEP is also a member of the UK Parliament, he or she will receive only one third of that salary in addition to his or her UK Parliamentary salary.

HM Treasury.

Free Improvised Music in Berlin

'Inventionen' was a festival, well-prepared by Berlin musicians and organised by friends of experimental music from the East and the West. It would have been hard to believe, a few years ago, that there would one day be one Berlin scene. But is it united since the fall of the wall? As far as the old problems and new arising difficulties in establishing this kind of music are concerned, one could say that it is. But could it ever be established? Isn't free improvisation a tautology?

How was it possible that this kind of music could survive during the hard years of Stalinist cultural policy - in a way that the Belgian piano player Fred Van Hove a few years ago could call the so-called GDR the "promised land of improvised music"? The former state's ideologists first banned jazz as 'decadent' and 'bourgeois' but later used it for propaganda purposes to show that they aren't as regressive as the West commonly believed. In fact, it was all more complicated. There was no freedom of traveling, but some of the jazz musicians were allowed to tour and obliged to pay a high percentage of the fees to the state. On the other hand jazz musicians inside the country sometimes have been in the role of highly qualified fools: singing 'the truth', but not being taken as seriously as the politicians, the writers or the journalists. Something in between, hard to handle, very delicate.

Fortunately, improvised music was/is more than a political statement, which is why it can survive even when the system will change. For the musicians themselves it is more the economical side of the change which makes it difficult. To make a living from this kind of activity always was hard for colleagues in the Western

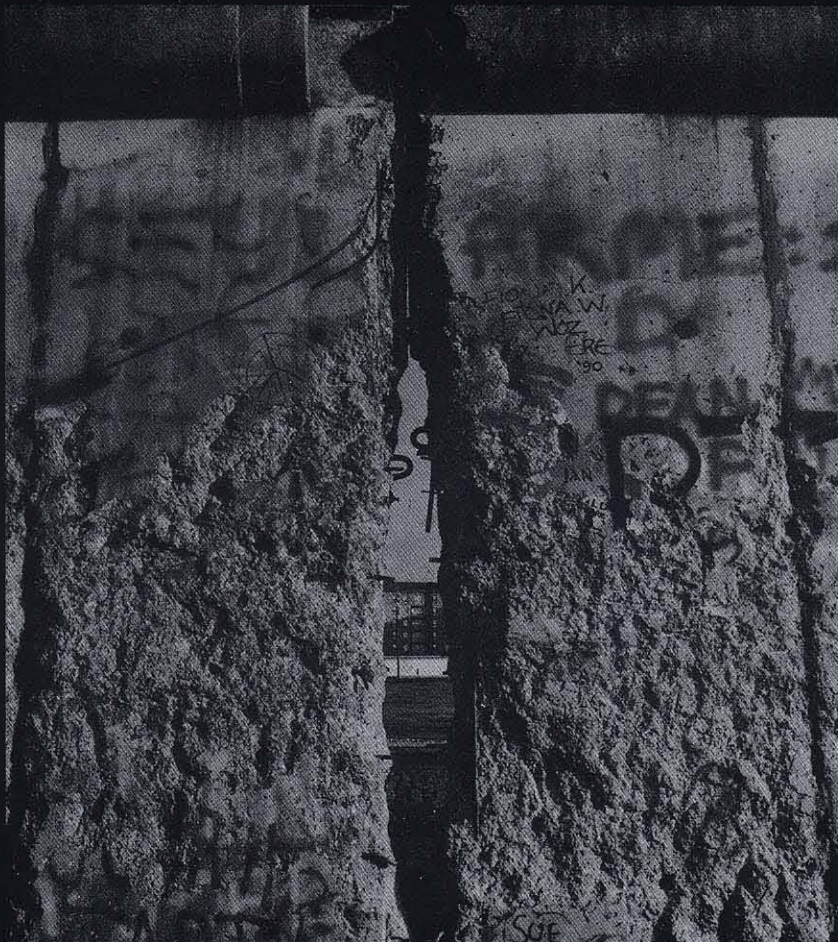
part of the country and the city of Berlin. Now the Eastern musicians have to struggle for cultural acceptance under the new conditions and in front of an audience who are short of money and influenced, if not overwhelmed, by Western touches of glamour. At the same time they have to survive within a new system which isn't cosy with freelancing artists.

Against this backdrop, it was astonishing that a 3-day festival of free improvised music with an uncompromising programme could be organised in East Berlin. The festival presented improvising musicians, well-known in East Germany such as pianist Hermann Keller, or trombonist Gunter Heinz, who was the spiritus rector of the whole event, in duo with Swiss electronics specialist Thomas Kessler. Among the lesser known groups in attendance were the Wiesbaden Improvisation Ensemble. Two groups from Switzerland - a trio of Markus Eichenberger (reeds), Michel Seigner (vocals and guitar), and Alfred Zimmerlin (cello) and the trio Nachtluft (with Jaques Widmer, Gunter Muller and Andres Bosshard, playing percussions and electronics), demonstrated a fascinating level of sound exploration and innovative creation. The international trio of Maggie Nicols (voice), Hungarian pianist Gyorgy Szabados and German trombone player Johannes Bauer,

who had never played together before, revealed an almost ritual aspect of musical improvisation.

AMM with John Tilbury on piano, Lou Gare on saxophone, Keith Rowe on guitar, and Eddie Prevost on persussion was without any doubt one of the festival's highlights. That the music is still fresh over all the years was thrilling for all those who knew about the group's history. There is no hint to find any words for something which is (in an improvised process) composed of meanings which are not to be compared with the semantics of literature. It was refreshing to listen to (and mind-opening) because of the resistance and inventiveness of the senses, which are well understood among those who have never acclaimed the former system in the East, but who are nevertheless critical in a situation which can't be described in an obsolete East/West (black/white, composed/improvised) terminology. Maybe this, at least, could also be a sign of the changes. I would like to go over the border (which still exists in the minds of those who suffered from it) with sounds like that of AMM in my walkman.

BERT NOGLIK



C O M M E N T

Edge 92

A blunt approach

In 1988 the first Edge event was held in London with a small element touring to Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The Edge Biennale Trust collaborated with the Air Gallery to present a series of performances and installations by a number of international artists in predominantly non-gallery locations in Clerkenwell. Although a borrowed idea its scale and potential was impressive enough to convince artists, promoters, and funders tentatively to support the project. Edge 88 was only a partial critical success but was executed with very limited resources.

The second Edge, with further funding and increased staff, was presented in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1990 and the collaborators were Projects UK. Edge 90 was presented in an empty warehouse with a few satellite performances and installations elsewhere in the city. Again the artist list was international. The very much smaller Edge 90 in Glasgow was based in an old school. Edge 90 received funding for events in Rotterdam from the Rotterdam Arts Council (£20,000) and London from GLA (£12,000) but these did not take place. With international initiatives funding of £15,000 and development funds from Northern Arts of £24,000 Edge 92 was planned. Edge 92, the third and to date richest, took place in Madrid and the Spitalfields district of London with substantial funding from Madrid as European City of Culture (£150,000), the Arts Council, through project funding and the Enhancement Fund (£100,000), the London Arts Board (£45,000)

and other public sources particularly the Henry Moore Foundation and the Australia and Canada Councils.

Again, artists were invited to participate by making performances or installations for non-gallery environments, although this time there was no experienced and established collaborator. Much to the surprise of the British art community, though, the Arts Council had fully committed themselves to the Edge Biennale Trust by awarding them Enhancement Funding to begin in January 1991. This £77,000 a year for three years was to provide for three Directors with curatorial responsibilities, a regional base in Newcastle and proper management and strategic development. There are now only two directors and the organisation has moved to London. In light of this high financial stake there was intense anticipation and high expectation in the Arts Council of a successful Edge 92, particularly in Madrid, as the first reciprocal international project it had managed to organise after its failure in Rotterdam in 1990.

Unfortunately, it was not to be. Edge 92 in Madrid, described by one Arts Council Officer as 'shambolic', was followed by an even worse organisational mess in London ('dire' New Statesman). Artists have been complaining bitterly of a lack of expected resources and professional and technical support and, according to Time Out, total incompetence on behalf of the Edge organisers. Rose Finn Kelcey refused to participate in Madrid, due to the lack of a suitable venue, although Edge had been planning the event for a year, and Helen Chadwick, had to produce her work with no assistance whatsoever, has complained vociferously to the Arts Council. Marina Abramovic could not perform the opening performance as there was insufficient technical support; she says it is the first time she has ever cancelled a performance. Artists have complained about publicity promoting their participation being circulated to funding bodies before conditions have been agreed and contracts signed. A disturbing insensitivity has been reported with regards to relationships between the different communities in the Brick Lane area, particularly the unnecessary distress caused by the lack of proper liaison prior to the Cerny project. The potential audience was large but untapped due to poor publicity (the publicity officer resigned before the London opening) and those that did

tramp hopefully around the east end of London in the hot sunshine looking for events and installations discovered venues closed or changed and performances mysteriously cancelled, with little or no information concerning rescheduling. It did not go unnoticed by artists and administrators that both cities had a surprising lack of artistic activity in relation to the level of subsidy the organisation claimed to have raised towards artists' projects. In the final issue of the now defunct Artscribe magazine the Edge organisers were boasting of having raised funds of half a million pounds; presumably accurate as the editor at the time, Marjorie Althorp-Guyton, is also a board member of the Edge Biennale Trust. A further much noted irony was that the work which attracted the most popular and critical acclaim had its production and finances managed by a gallery; namely Rose Finn Kelcey installation at Chisenhale. As Sarah Kent stated in a scathing Time Out preview article, "Adept at raising cash, the Edge team seems less good at spending it wisely".

Further controversy and speculation surrounds the recent decision by Richard Wilson not to work with the Edge Biennale Trust in the Centre for Contemporary Art in Seville as part of Expo. The Department of Trade and Industry, via Luke Ritner, the Director of British cultural activities at the world fair, awarded a grant of £40,000, with over a third paid in advance, towards a Richard Wilson installation and new commission to take place in June. The financial conditions of his participation were, allegedly, unexpectedly changed by the Edge Biennale Trust and Wilson's refusal to continue resulted in the project being cancelled.

With further proposed grants from the Australia Council and the Perth Festival of over £5,000 towards an event in Perth next year, as well as plans for Edge 94 to take place in Prague and in Dublin with the involvement of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, it remains to be seen if their programme plans recover and how they will develop.

In this country levels of funding for this type of activity are very low in comparison to other visual art subsidies. The main organisations dedicated to promoting this work over the last ten to fifteen years are getting smaller in number and are based mainly outside London. They survive on far smaller sums of money and their



Pepe Espalliu 'Peter' St. Paul's Church, one of the successful projects in Edge 92 (see review p64)

photo: Peter Barker

efforts, with the support of artists, created the climate for the existence of an international festival of this type. As we know, a disdain for professional practice and a contempt for the protocols of public funding can deeply damage the credibility of any practice or organisation as well as undermine the potential for strategic financial and political support. By refusing to work with the Edge Biennale Trust the British artists and others with reputations at risk withdrew not just their participation but, by implication, their commitment to what this organisation represents professionally and ideologically.

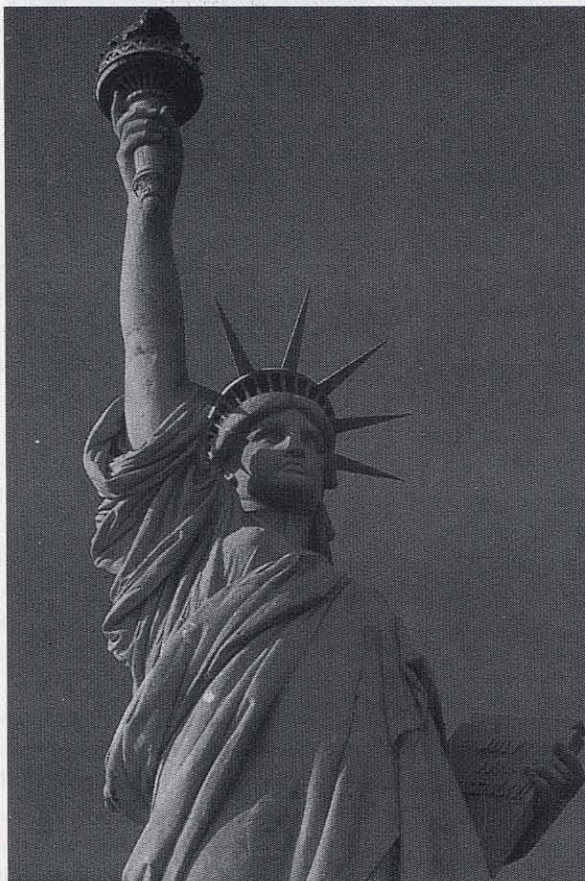
Crudely, the successful placement of art works beyond the gallery is contingent on the understanding that the context is integral to meaning and that the collective activity is contributing to an ongoing and accumulating ideological residue that assists in the greater understanding of a sense of place. Those organisations who have worked successfully with artists over a number of years in different contexts (Art Research and Exchange, Projects UK, Orchard

Gallery, EventSpace, Hull Time Based Arts, TSWA) have been intelligently conscious of history and place as necessities providing ballast and support for artists working in and for a community. The recent large exhibitions of installations at the Hayward Gallery, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and now Edge 92 demonstrate, in part, the dismal critical vacuum that exists behind the institution when appropriating work and sensibilities in this way and on this scale. More is required than herding artists into a gallery or an area of a city and asking them to stuff it with art. No doubt the Arts Council review will identify the causes of the spectacular failure of Edge 92 and perhaps, with the end of current Enhancement Funding status due shortly, if this funding is still available, more deserving organisations will benefit.

RONNIE Kael

New York: The Sound Factory

The visitor to New York, coming for the first time, inevitably arrives with the city already in his head, mythologised, fabricated. As he sees the blocked and jagged skyline of Manhattan, he experiences a tremor of awe and excitement that is bordered by a hint of fear. The scale of the human effort sunk into what was once the untouched swamp of the island shrinks the individual, offers the intimation of approaching the



centre of the world, of the imminent revelation of the reality of our century's lost dream.

But New York is not a city that reveals its essence easily. The visitor who arrives sceptical is likely to be seduced, s/he who comes expecting utopia, quickly disillusioned. Inasmuch as New York is the centre of a centreless world, a world of surface, the search for its secret will fall into a cataloguing of appearances and impressions.

It is a manifold city, the centre of many worlds. It represents the fully invested experiment of the western world's last century. As such it contains all the elements constitutive of that history, of the US in general, of the first world and of the third world. There is all the poverty and brutality and all the hyperbolic symbols of fortune, the intense expenditure of energy and movement. The city is officially bankrupt, crisis has been declared many times over the last decades, while the island is the home of some of the planet's richest people ever. All the signs of the degradation of values within the economic struggle for survival are evident, but there is also much evidence of the innovation in both high art and mass culture that the city has inspired. New York houses one of the world's greatest concentrations of cultural treasures.

Standing elevated at the top of the world, on the 108th floor of the World Trade Center in downtown Manhattan, you have a sense of all this. The verticality of New York architecture has become a metaphor for the city's supposed self-sufficiency, its reliance on its own miraculous present and its divorce from history and the rest of the world. The island of Manhattan lies surrounded by the dirty silver waters of the Hudson, numerous bridges of double and triple layered expressways feed the incessant flux of traffic in the city centre. From here every last square inch of the island would seem to have been smeared with the dirty grey-brown concrete once knifed across its surface forever. On top of this are traced the scar-

ified lines of the grid-iron, the perpendicular avenues and roads. The deliberateness of this scheme militates against any geometry of intimacy, everything is manifest and public here, and seems somewhat ironic set against the randomness of the buildings. The bristling coral of skyscrapers in mid-town rises unexpectedly and elsewhere monumental blocks of brick and concrete are randomly dropped. Historic town houses and churches are often found squeezed and choked between new towers.

Down in the street though, among the New Yorkers, things are more human. It is a fallacy that New Yorkers are not friendly. Despite the obligation to remain continually in motion people will help you out, often delivering one degree of assistance more than was expected. There seems to be a high level of observation, eye contact is frequent, the motivation is curiosity and looking does not provoke aggression. Nothing is hidden here, neither poverty nor wealth. In the streets there is always something to see, something you will never have seen anywhere else. The manholes constantly belch steam and the air is always loud with a background roar of life, punctuated by the sounds of brakes, horns and whistles. The city itself is alive and consuming energy. There is a general impression of sloppiness. Movement is not the quick flash along the singing lines that had been anticipated but rather a lumbering high-entropy unstability, a stubborn high-mass, high-pain, high-gravity movement. The cars move like boats. The taxis sloop around corners but pick up speed on the straights in the canyon-like streets when the lights are with them. Their undercarriages bottom out frequently on the uneven road. More noise, more sparks. The air is thick, though it often shines in the lights. Old ladies push their shopping-trolley homes through Central Park, the homeless stop you for money every third block or sit taking a steam bath on the air conditioning vent of a building whose rents top a hundred dollars a day, a cop waits arrogantly while an old man stoops to shine his boots in Little Italy. All this is obvious, recognised, there is something about the scale of the cityscape that seems to lead to a common awareness that everyone is in it together, no one is exempt. New York is very human; human all too human, in fact.

The Sound Factory is a nightclub spawning imitations but which will never be emulated anywhere else. You arrive at 4 am and join the line to enter. The line is constant throughout the night but moves quickly, people are always arriving and leaving, this is New York.

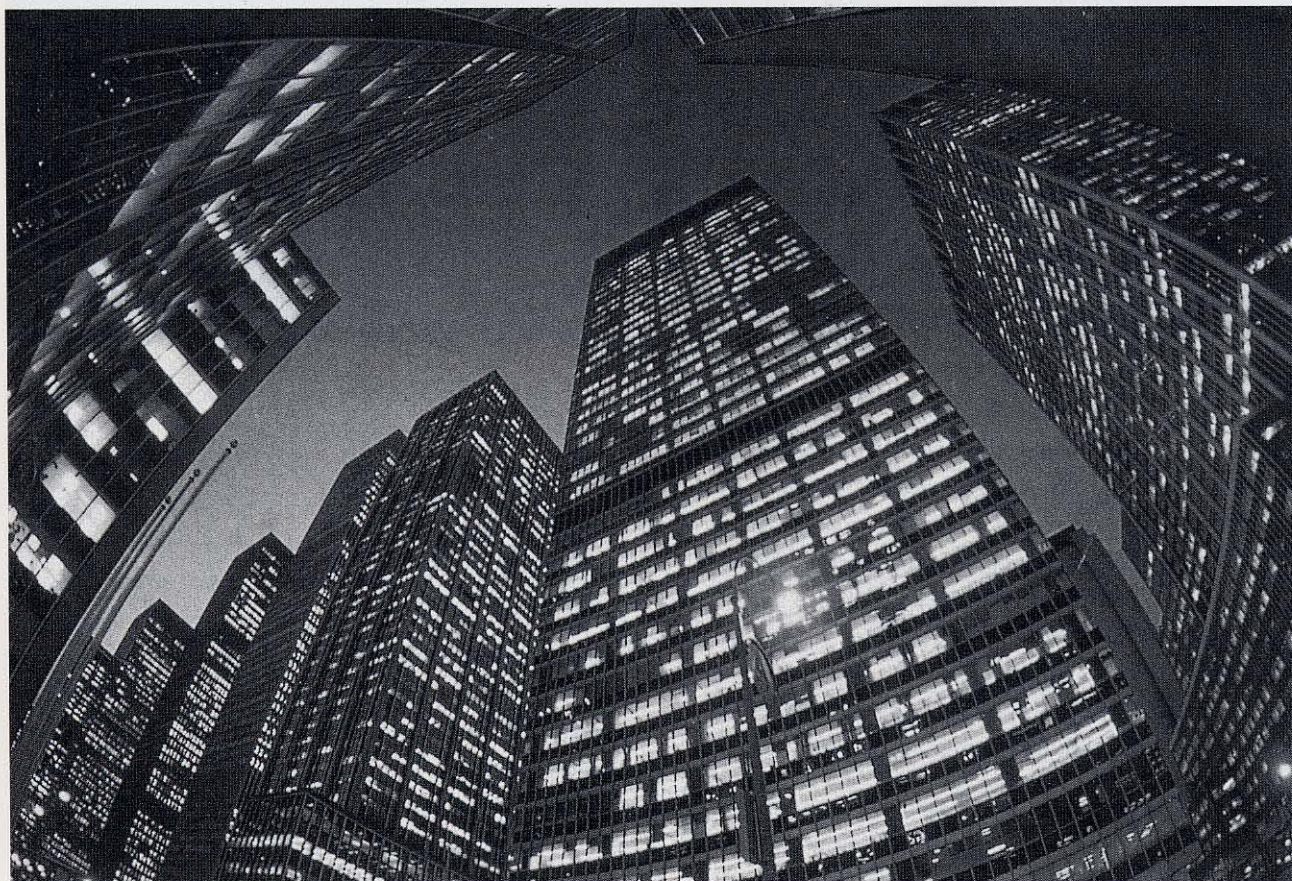
Thankfully you are quickly inside, at 4 am in winter it's cold and many of the people are not wearing much. You are briefly frisked and a metal detector is passed over you, a precaution against guns. You pass inside and the music immediately envelopes you, without a doubt the best house music you will ever hear. Inside it's a huge space like an old aircraft hangar, the dancefloor is packed with people dancing to house music blasted out of towering speaker stacks. The performance is orchestrated from a sound laboratory elevated away at the back of the dancefloor. The air is saturated and the atmosphere infused with sex. It's a heady feeling that affects you immediately, there is a wholesome lack of inhibitions and an intoxicating self-confidence on display here. The Sound Factory caters predominantly to the gay communities of New York and 90% of the people here are homosexual, this is a major forum of expression and locus of solidarity. People dance and sell themselves. You go onto the dancefloor which is packed and saturated with sweat, people dance for hours, often fuelled by cocaine or ecstasy. Around you are a hundred men with muscle-built torsos, wearing tight jeans and a thin covering of sweat, dancing in groups, sometimes in couples. They are all young, good-looking, with short-cropped hair and muscles, the dancing seldom leaves much to the

imagination. There are transvestites in catsuits, fishnets and high heels, others in outrageously camp ball-gowns. Some are beautifully feminine, others are undisguisedly male. Sex is simulated on stage and around you, this is an eye-opening experience. You dance to the unremitting music for an hour, unhassled, your own space respected by those around you. Eventually you decide to go to the bar for a drink. There is no alcohol on sale, clearly it is deemed unnecessary, as indeed it is to this experience. You take a bottle of water for which you pay \$2. Standing at the bar for a while you can reflect on the scene before you. There are a large number of the hardcore SM gays who circulate in familiar groups, all wearing the uniform of their aggressive aesthetic. They don't wear much, frequently more naked than dressed, but always in a combination of leather and chains and white underwear. You look up to the roof of the bar to see a black dancer appear in a negligible and rapidly diminishing costume, soon dancing naked. He is replaced by another and another. In the corner several people are 'voguing', a mysterious New York dance involving the repetition of complicated sword-like gestures made with the hands around the face. Eventually you may feel you've seen enough, although walking out you see things that make you doubt this. You exit the club. It

is 7 am, it is fully morning, there is a line of taxis a hundred metres long waiting outside, the line of people waiting to go in is exactly as it was three hours ago, the club won't shut until midday. You go and get some breakfast and take a taxi home.

The experience of New York is more than the fascination of its myth, and more than a hypnosis of scale. It is a city which essentially precludes understanding or characterisation. It is against the monstrous dimensions of the cityscape that everyone immediately attains to the equally tainted status of being one of its citizens. It is in the steep-sided streets where the tarmac constantly steams that the hope of redemption is retained. If you can survive in New York you can survive anywhere. More importantly if New York can survive, so can we all.

JOHN PAUL JONES



PAIN IN THE WEST

Self-inflicted pain has been a standby of solo performers for... centuries. Christian flagellants still parade their bleeding skins today, in Spain. Even the modest suffering of sweating middle-aged men in penal black suits carrying a heavy plaster statue of the Virgin shoulder-high up a stoney road in the August sun in Portugal, can excite feelings of heroic empathy in the converted.

Geoff Dyer, in a recent article in the Guardian (June 13th) identified a link between photographs of sportsmen in extreme and familiar images from Renaissance *pietas*: *'For 2,000 years the single most potent image in Western culture*

The Curtain Rises II

Roland Miller

has been of a man, almost naked, in the extremes of exhaustion and pain.' Dyer illustrated his piece with references to boxer Barry McGuigan, the Ali-Frazier fight in Manilla, and to athletes crossing the finishing line, faces contorted, limbs spread-eagled. Veiled references to classical heroic sculpture in sports photography are common. The figure of Prometheus, whom Dyer also described, has been invoked by artists and poets as a symbol of struggle against restraining bonds, imposed on the creative spark. The photograph by Chris Smith of Barry McGuigan resting in his corner that illustrated Dyer's article is famous for its likeness, not to McGuigan, but to a Renaissance crucified Christ. It was a fight McGuigan lost. Kassel's ninth Documenta this year was subtitled *'The Olympics*

of Art', dignifying, or trivialising, a connection between the two cultural traditions.

Richard Hamilton's depiction of an Irish Republican hunger striker showed him as a Christ, bearded, suffering, a blanket draped round his shoulders, the walls of his cell smeared with his own excrement. In Derry during the *'Dirty Protest'* I saw young republican sympathisers sitting in makeshift breeze-block cells, at the roadside, collecting money for their cause. They had blankets draped around them, and their faces were daubed with mud. It was winter, and - they confided to me - they had kept their clothes on under the blankets.

In the last three decades of performance art a number of (mostly male) artists have put their bodies through extremes of endurance. Sometimes with the aid of real or simulated human waste, viscera, blood, self-incarceration, fasting, wounding, or just plain long distance endurance. One thinks of **Stuart Brisley**, who confronted *"...his audience with the state of alienation and its effect on the individual... By extension the performer or individual represents a model for society... Sometimes the model is of society in general... At other times it can be more specific... (eg) 'You Know it Makes Sense' (1972), which was a direct reaction to the news of torture by the British Army in Northern Ireland... Brisley the artist re-enacts the state of alienation... At Gallery House (in another work) he spent days immersed in a bathtub of cold water and offal".*^[1] Brisley's admirable concern was, and is, to confront society artistically with the

political truths of its time.

One thinks of **Alastair MacLennan**, spending 72 hours in a prison of his own devising, naked, or dressed in the ambiguous costume of an urban terrorist. One effect on spectators of the work of artists who put themselves through physical extremes is a sort of catharsis. We may feel more able to cope with the horror of the conflict in Northern Ireland because we have witnessed a man experiencing pain in that (simulated) context, or against that background. We may feel purged, and we may also feel absolved.

By contrast, **Hermann Nitsch**, the Austrian action artist, in the '60s, used animal carcasses to re-create Dionysian rituals, which he felt embraced the origins of Christian

ceremonies such as the mass. The use by Nitsch of naked (live) human bodies, the application to their genitalia of animal entrails, the self-humiliation of other contemporary artists (Gunter Brus, Otto Muhl) and their focus on defecation seem to have been delineated by some authorities to the role of neo-Dada-ism, outrageous behaviour, 'blasphemy' and anal obsession in the psychological and cultural reaction to the Nazi era.^[2]

In the USA, individual physical endurance as part of art performance developed at a time when political realities had their own theatrical dimension. In New York in the late '60s, **Vito Acconci** punished his own body and famously masturbated under a gallery floor. The political violence of the USA in the '60s and '70s produced a number of 'happenings' that sought to reflect the times. There is always a degree of voyeuristic entertainment to



POP Performance, 1982

be derived from watching a performance. Does this make the spectator complicit? **Wencke Mulheisen**, performing with her group 'Selbstdarstellung' (Self-representation) in the 2nd Lyon Performance Symposium, 1980, inflicted cold water, hot water, dirty water, filth and (German) verbal abuse on her naked, cowering victims, who never fought back, or ran away. It was a demonstration of true sado-masochism, with the 'artist' in absolute control. The audience, and even the attendant journalists, were outraged, baffled, but entertained, and willing to give Mulheisen the benefit of the doubt. Nobody intervened.

PAIN IN THE EAST

The pain of sport is a by-product of extreme physical effort, for money, for glory. Religious anguish is both theatrical - an imitation of martyrdom - and ecstatic;

physical extremes, like fasting, may induce a spiritual state of trance. Penance is induced by guilt. The simulation of pain and of alienation is essentially mimetic. Self-induced artistic pain may partake of all of these, it has always been strong theatre.

Amongst artists performing in the Czech and Slovak Republics, and in Poland, pain, self-inflicted pain, was a metaphor for the political system under which they all lived. Unlike State-subsidised avant-garde art in the West, live art was rarely, if ever 'official' in the East. No need to demonstrate imprisonment when you had the experience of real prison to call on. **Milan Knizak** is a Czech artist well known in the West because he was imprisoned by the State for anti-social tendencies. He made public performances in Czecho-Slovakia throughout the '60s (today he is Dean of the Prague Academy of Art). The

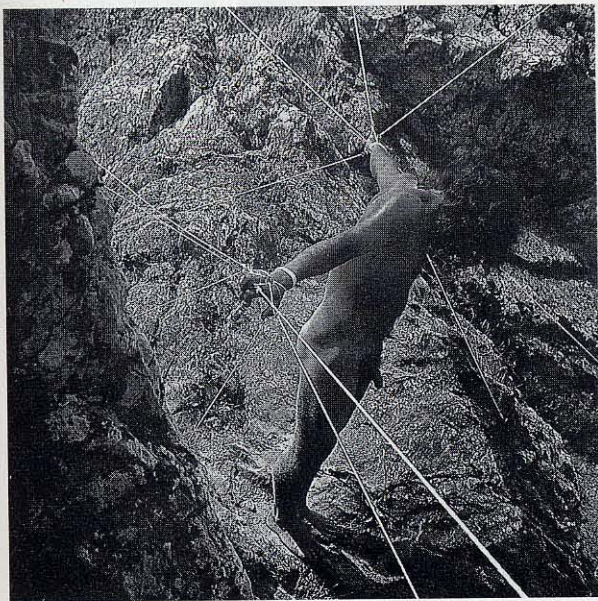


East European artists whose work can now, since 1989, be seen in documentary form, whose actions were part of the cultural and political underground, did not suffer from self-imposed pain, they lived in pain, in common with the majority of their fellow citizens.

I saw **Petr Stembera**, for example, from Prague, perform in Poland in 1978, in an artists' gathering near Poznan. He drew himself along the floor, flat on his stomach, hands tied behind him, over two lines of black and white powder, one for each leg. He was striving to reach the end of these lines, but as he moved, an assistant poured acid onto strings trailing behind his bare feet. The acid burned away the strings, so that gradually, like a lit fuse, the splashes of acid came closer to his bare, upturned feet. The question was, would he reach the end of the lines of powder before the acid had burned away the strings

and touched his flesh? In another action in the same year he balanced his chin on a thin sheet of glass, and pushed it forward, along the floor, risking injury. We see **Tomas Ruller**, literally, playing with fire in Opatov in 1988. Or **Jiri Sozansky** demonstrating the life of a couple sharing a cage with a 'skeleton'. Or the group **P.O.P** showing a Promethean male figure bound to the earth, to grass, to rock, and to an uprooted tree. These performances were often given for small, secretive audiences, or for the camera alone, because the very act of making avant garde art was an offence in the eyes of the State. The meanings of the actions were close to the spectators, because they knew that what was represented metaphorically could happen, (might already have happened) literally, and painfully, to them.

An audience witnessing a cathartic mimetic act, by con-

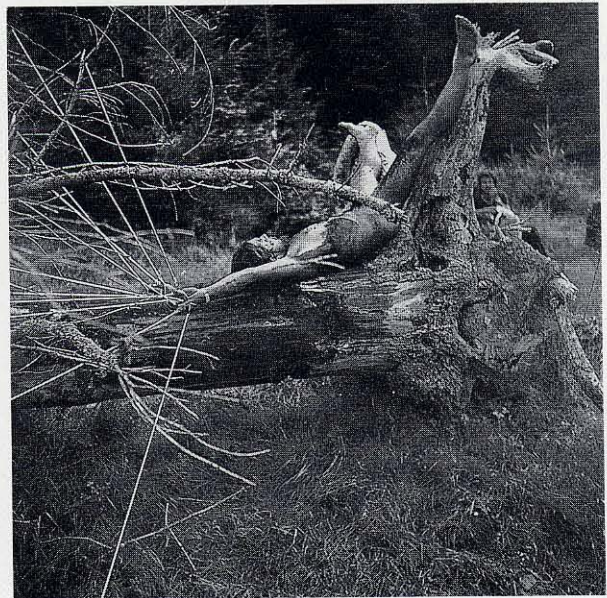


trast, distanced from the reality on which it is based, knows that what is represented is unlikely to happen to them, nor is it really happening to the performer. The artist, like the actor, intends the audience to understand the nature of the horror which they are being shown by an act of descriptive representation. Nobody involved in the cultural exchange needs to actually experience what is being shown. It has been often said that the blinding of Oedipus, or Gloucester in King Lear, can only work if it is not real. Shakespeare came one step nearer to reality by showing the eyes put out. The artists we are considering here were living within the situation they sought to represent, which their audiences (if any) were also themselves experiencing.

When the Polish artist **Zbigniew Warpechowski** performed in England in November 1981, he deliberately

pierced his hand on a 6 inch nail, illustrating the dilemma of a people caught by history, politics and religion, fixed in time and place. A Christ-like act, it was entirely self-motivated, and real. Shortly after Warpechowski's return to Poland, General Jaruzelski's Government declared martial law against Solidarity, and the era of imprisonment and State terrorism started over again.

It is the context in which an artistic action takes place that determines whether it is received as an imitation (mimetic) - or as a ritual re-enactment, of the real thing. Artists on both sides of the iron curtain have felt themselves oppressed and harassed by their governments, and still do. But whereas we, and I speak as a member of the dominant class, gender, and race, could participate safely in our cathartic theatre, it was not the same for our colleagues in those other countries. Adrian Henri, in



Environments and Happenings, devotes the following paragraph to a dead poet:

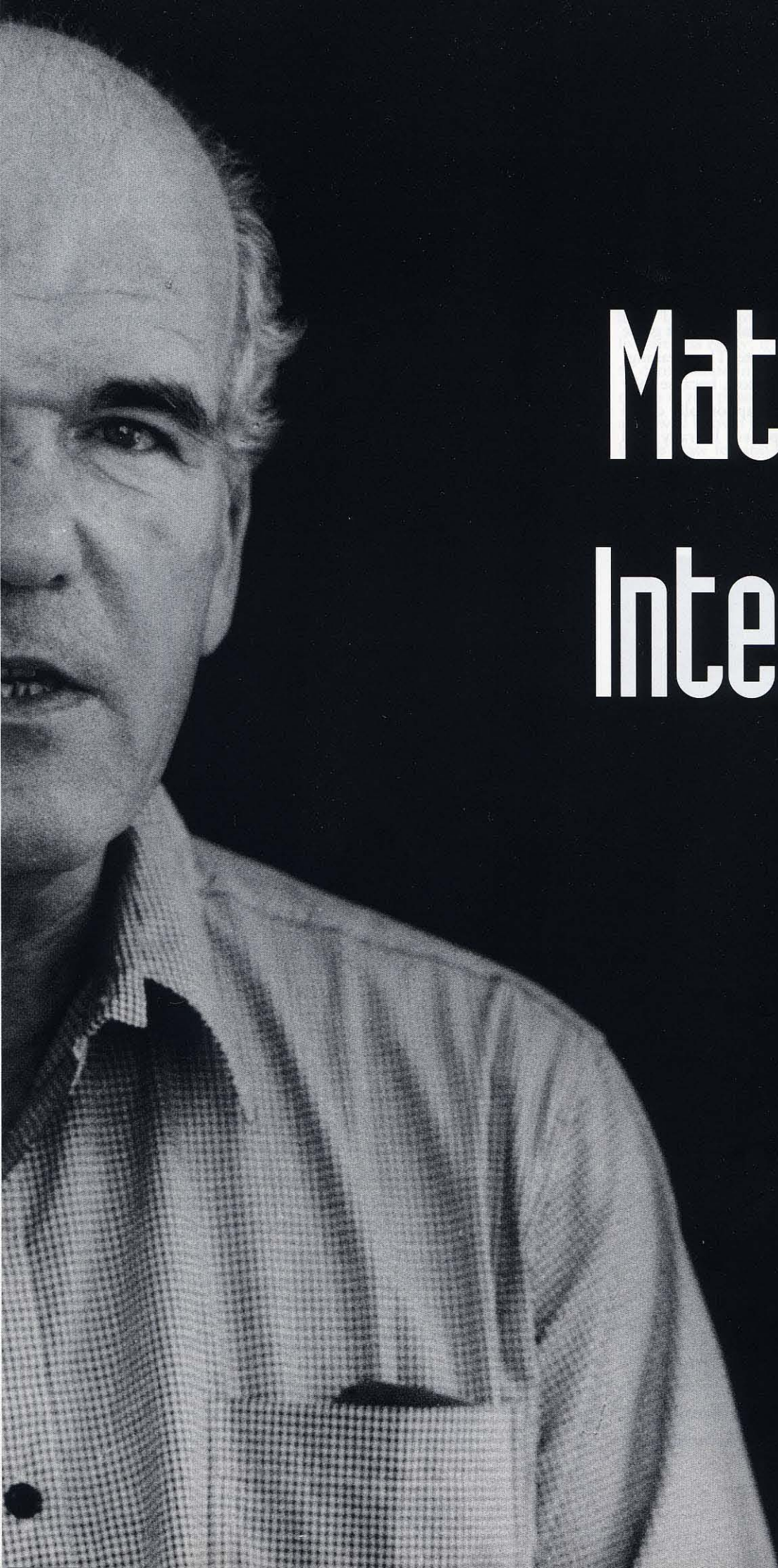
"During the brief period of artistic freedom which ended in 1968, Czechoslovakia was the most active of Eastern European countries in this area (happenings). Just how serious this activity can be is seen from the 'Black Happening' of the poet Josef Honys (1919-69), who arranged a fake funeral for himself as a 'Mystification Event', invited his friends, and then in fact committed suicide unknown to his friends."

[1] Caroline Tisdall, *Studio International*, (Performance issue) vol.192 No.982 July/August 1976.

[2] see Adrian Henri, *Environments and Happenings*, Thames and Hudson 1974.

Illustrations are taken from the catalogue of *Umeni Akce*, curated by Vlasta Cihakova-Noshiro, and shown in the Povazska Gallery, Zilina, Slovakia, August 1991.

Note: in *The Curtain Rises - part one* (Variant issue 11), it was erroneously stated that the exhibition, *Umeni Akce* was curated by Alex Mlynarcik. He was responsible for arranging a shortened version in Zilina, the original exhibition was shown in Prague.



Harry Mathews Interview

Ed Baxter

Photo: John Foley

The writer Harry Mathews was born in New York in 1930. He is the only English-speaking member of the Oulipo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle: Workshop of Potential Literature), the Parisian group founded by Raymond Queneau and Francois LeLionnais in 1961 to apply mathematical structures to writing. Other Oulipo members have included the late Georges Perec and Italo Calvino.

Mathews is the author of four novels - *The Conversions* (1962), *Tlooth* (1966), *The Sinking of the Odradek Stadium* (1971) and *Cigarettes* (1987) - as well as several collections of shorter prose works and volumes of poetry. His latest book is a collection of critical essays, *Immeasurable Distances* (The Lapis Press, 1991) - "the record of a writer's efforts to discover why he and certain of his friends have chosen to write as they do". Mathews' works, which are never less than astonishing, mark him out as a radical experimentalist active within the modernist tradition - a restlessly inquiring mind, passionately committed to writing.

Mathews has described himself as sometimes coming across as "an infuriating and slightly stupid conversationalist". Not to be out-done, Ed Baxter interviewed him on a recent visit to London.

EB: Events such as an author's reading and the launch of a new book generally appear to the reading public as fashionable flash-in-the-pan affairs, with you, the author, making appearances in the literary journals and magazines, then effectively disappearing until the publication of your next novel. Despite this, you seem to be a part of a discernible tradition in European literature - even though you're an American. It's a tradition that perhaps has its roots in Sterne and Jean-Paul Richter and is developed in different ways by writers like De Quincey and Roussel. Its modern manifestations are the works of writers like Raymond Queneau, Georges Perec and yourself ... Would you care to digress - even to disagree?

HM: I think that may be true here: it's hardly true in America. There this tradition didn't exist until fairly recently, when it became very much of a school. In the '60s and '70s a whole batch of novelists started writing self-referential novels, language-based novels, non-representational novels. It's very interesting, but it made me stop writing in this way. The point of it for me had been to some extent iconoclastic. I've always felt you have to break things open to create new space... for the same old

things to happen. I have no illusions about anything really new happening in the act of reading or in the process that occurs between the reader and the writer, but simply to maintain the uses of literature you have to try and approach it in a new way; and when the kind of writing that is exemplified in my work by *The Conversions* became something current, became diffused, it lost a lot of its conscious point. Analogously, Picasso lost all his interest in African art (which was for him a kind of terrific new weapon) once it became fashionable.

As you have suggested, certainly in France and, to some extent, in Italy and Germany, there is a tradition of exploratory writing, writing as a scouting operation rather than just a recording of what is there. For instance, Flaubert always struck me as particularly interesting because he always claimed to be a realist; but his realism doesn't look like anybody else's realism, it works in a way akin to the work of Mallarmé or Baudelaire: it's the effect of words which produce the illusion of the object, rather than description and linear sympathetic narrative. It's quite astonishing thinking about a series of his sentences: something virtually untranslatable. Even the very good translations of his books are readings of his works rather than recreations of them. You *have* to leave something out, the actual word-to-word functioning is so incredibly intense. And there's something also in Flaubert that matters a great deal to me as a possibility: it's impossible to prove how relevant this is to his writing. It is this: Flaubert would be writing about something - a garden, for example; this would be a garden in a particular village in Normandy in 1853, and he would spend two weeks finding out exactly what plants would have been grown in such a garden. He would learn all the information about the plants, their scientific names as well as their popular names, their smell, their uses; and this would end up as a sentence and a half.

It seems to me that all the words and all the knowledge that he accumulated that is *not* present in that sentence and a half adds to its extraordinary density, its power. Another example of the same thing: the Oulipo invented a kind of variation of the sestina form, which is essentially a self-destructing sestina. You have your original group of six end words. And then with each stanza you introduce three more, barging in and from another subject and blowing it to pieces. After two or three stanzas there are words from three or four of these groups in each six-line stanza. If you analyse it objectively, it has a rather simple form - you can do an AB, ABC kind of analysis, which is perfectly accurate. But when you actually use this procedure, you have all those different groups of words that both recur and disappear, so that there are

always absent words in play, even though there is no sign of them. Even though they are not manifest in any demonstrable way, for me they very much lend their weight to the interference of one semantic group with another.

Another Oulipian procedure: *La Belle Absente*, the Absent Fair, which is a combination of the lipogram and the acrostic. If you're writing a poem to the Absent Fair and her name is Mary, your four line poem will have all the letters of the alphabet in the first line except for M. And then the second line will have all the letters of the alphabet except for A, and so on. So that Mary is spelled out acrostically and negatively – that is to say, the absence of the name creates its presence. It's one of the simplest ways of going about problems of the unsaid, *le non-dit*, which has occupied theoreticians a great deal over the last twenty years – of which I am not one. Anyway, that tradition you mentioned is much more active in Europe. How do you feel about that here?

EB: Well, I wonder if it's not thought of as exotic, an import from continental Europe.

HM: What of the home grown practitioners, the non-mainstream practitioners?

EB: Their position is different from, say, yours. You seem to be suggesting that your impulse is quite recalcitrant: as soon as something becomes currency you want to move on, to coin new currencies. My impression is that literary currency here has been virtually static since the war. There are lots of competing non-establishment strands, but there is very little sense of self-definition in those strands; or self-definition is such that it's imploded and there is minimal cross-fertilization between them. When *The Conversions* was republished here, its impact, and that of Georges Perec's *Life a Users Manual* in David Bellos's translation, appeared to be comparatively great for the time that the books were held in the spotlight of fashion, but then the spotlight moved elsewhere. And I don't think there exists in Britain any real sense of either where things are coming from or where they are going. There is no generalised understanding of the structures of writing. Perhaps a lot of people would say I'm being cynical and overstating the case, or just wrong, but that's how I see it.

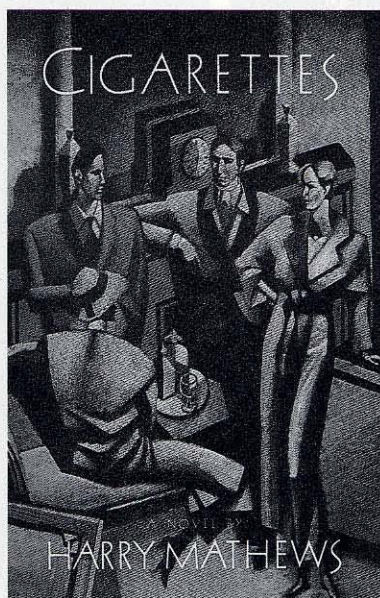
HM: I think you're right to an extent. Of the different

countries I've known, France is the only one which has an extraordinary, passionate devotion to the literary idea; and it is this commitment that has spawned a great many different schools, who are not necessarily in agreement. It is certainly lacking in the United States and, though I can't really speak for England, the impression I get is that there are a lot of English who like to read but they seem basically diffident about it. They read with a very intense curiosity, but it is curiosity rather than an expectation of revelations of the kind that I certainly discovered in reading English poetry when I was a boy. There seems to be an awful lot of interesting writing here. Is there a marginal tradition here? An approach to eccentric writing? In America, which is far worse than England will ever be, in terms of its readership – horrendously depressing – there's still room for people like Coover who if not a best-seller, is nevertheless recognised and acknowledged to a certain extent; and others like Barthelme, who have had quite successful careers.

EB: I don't get the feeling that the system of acknowledgment here functions as well as it does in the United States or France. It's very much the case that the literary establishment is dominated by a handful of cliques. Fringe material does circulate, but the way it circulates is such that one can say it doesn't appear in the world in any true sense of the word *publication*.

HM: I wonder if there's ever been a real concern here with the whole idea of Modernism, which to my mind is so immensely exciting. I mean, the whole

reversal of the point of view of artists towards their own art which took place at the beginning of the century, which for me was a radical step that cannot be *untaken*, but which always needs to be taken again and again – which is perhaps why my first novels started losing their value as modernist declarations of intent once they could fit into a school. I'm just being finicky; I was correcting a little bit the impression you may have had, that I wasn't interested in doing something when it became widespread. If I'd published *The Conversions* in 1975, everyone would have found it quite normal. When it was published in 1962, people thought I was out of my head. Intelligent, well-informed readers asked, *What are you doing? What are you doing this for? Why are you doing this?* I just said, "Well, read it slowly out loud" – which I think is usually enough to have it work.



An appalling phenomenon in the United States is that reading is being replaced by a subversion of it, which I call scrolling, as in the computer. Readers now want to have scrolling done for them. Steven King is a marvelous inventor of stories, but his writing is not actually *writing*, it just keeps going by you, and you watch it.

EB: So one of the bottom lines for you is that the reader should engage in the material, and as an extension of that some profound understanding of what writing does is a positive thing?

HM: I'd agree with you if you'd leave out the word "profound".

EB: I mean something more than just the surface.

HM: Did you see "my" issue of the *Review of Contemporary Fiction*? It contains a lecture that I gave, in which I say that the only creator is the reader; that the function of the writer is to abandon the pretence of creation and supply the reader with the tools and the opportunity for becoming a creator. When someone's reading *The Iliad*, the only living voice there is the reader's. We have no idea what Homer meant, or sounded like, or was up to. We're light years away from that, but the greatness of Homer or anyone else who survives the reading of successive generations is that there *is* that room for creation on the reader's part. If you look at Chapman, Dryden, Fitzgerald's translations of *The Iliad*, you can't believe that they share the same original. They provide such astonishingly different views of the world and the work!

I don't want writing to be difficult, it doesn't have to be difficult, it doesn't have to be odd, original in any conspicuous way. But it does have to have the quality of engaging the reader in what is happening, what can happen on the page, with those materials the author has provided. And then the reader becomes a creator not a spectator, not somebody watching *Dallas* going by – not that I've anything against *Dallas*. At least not the early years... I hear it got pretty hairy later on. No, I love pop culture, it has its things – but that's another conversation.

EB: The position you're describing is a classic modernist position.

HM: And it's actually the Classic tradition.

EB: The obvious rejoinder to what you've said is, where

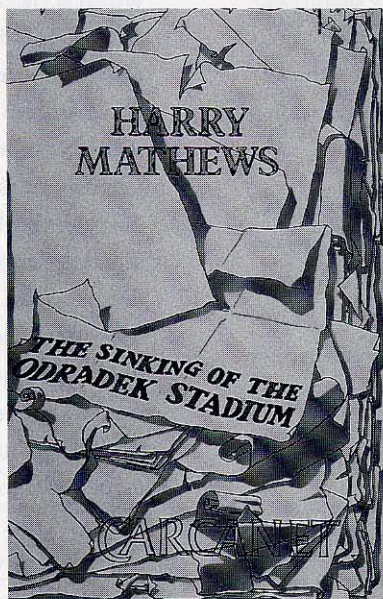
does that leave you as a reader of your books? If you're revising one of your books... In your *Autobiography*, I think it is, in the Atlas anthology of your work, you talk of rewriting rather than revising the text. What is your relation to the object which you produce but which in some ways is immediately distant from you, receding at a rapid rate? What sort of reader are you of your own works?

HM: Well, the way I get to be a creator is to be a reader of my own works. And that is the way in fact that communication takes place, Communication in writing for me is not "I know something or I have something to say" which I put on the page and then you get it. It's creating these possibilities which then generate the experience that we share as readers. That's the community in which the communication takes place, the community of readers

in which the writer is the first in time, not the first in quality. And that is not some kind of modesty on my part, I just know it's true. Some readers have read things of mine better than I have, they understand them better than I do. That's not a radical idea. If you think about poetry, that doesn't seem all that surprising. It's in the articulations, the saying and not the said. What's the difference between a poem and its paraphrase? What is there which cannot be translated into a prose paraphrase of the poem? That's something present in all writing, and it's not necessarily best explained by the author. The author is not necessarily in the best position to illuminate it.

EB: So in fact you would maintain that, for it to have any value for you, the writing always has to contain more than one could ever get out of it. A productive machine which over time will...

HM: I think that's what distinguishes true writing from apparent writing. That potentiality of interpretation. There never will be a final interpretation, a definitive translation, or a definitive interpretation of Shakespeare's plays, or Blake. And not only that, but there have been extraordinary readings of all those writings, really. For instance, Northrop Frye on the *Prophetic Books*: it's immensely exciting to take part in his reading and one says, *That's it!* And it *is*, but it's not the only possible reading. But then it becomes part of your reading. It's an act of creation on his part and he too lets the reader participate in his discovery. What makes Northrop Frye a good critic



is not just his ideas about Blake, all the work and research and time he spent, but the fact that he writes in such a way as to make the process of discovery that he's gone through available to the reader. The reader's excitement or sense of revelation can't come from anyone but himself: it doesn't feel that way, it looks as though the book were doing it. Shakespeare was sitting around in the Globe Theatre, or whatever theatre it might be, writing out parts for actors with specific playing needs – one of them would get sick, he'd have to change something, he wasn't thinking about Man and the Universe, he was providing materials for the play. I think he would have been very astonished to know what's happened to it. And then again not all that astonished: he surely knew...

EB: You are very conscious of what you are doing, living in a time when a consciousness of what writing does is comprehended. You've evidently moved on from work like *The Conversions*, in which you were very deliberately playing with the idea that you'll never get the punchline, to the formally apparently less awkward structure of *Cigarettes*. How has your perception of what you are doing with the novel changed?

HM: Despite the differences, there are a curious lot of things in common between *The Conversions* and *Cigarettes*, and one of them is this idea of reading: when you're reading, what you're doing is *reading*. My first three books obviously, but also *Cigarettes*, do not allow you to get away from the knowledge that what has been going on is *you reading the book*. I think this is terrific, there's nothing more wonderful than reading a book. Then there are the endings of the first three novels, which make it such that you can't say, *This is an experience that happened elsewhere and now is concluded* – in all three books, the book is put into question again at the end: in *The Conversions* by there being no answer and sort of anticipating *Tlooth* in the discovery that the narrator is black; in *Tlooth*, the sexual non-identification of the narrator and the main characters, which leads everyone – women as well as men – to assume that they're men. I think this is a genuinely feminist book because no one does anything but assume that. (Even though it's *said* in the course of the book.) And at the end of *The Sinking of the Odradek Stadium*, the title is the punchline; are the protagonists ever going to communicate again? There is a kind of aesthetic conclusion to that in Twang's enthusiastic expression of her love. It's a conclusion, but it is not a narrative conclusion.

In *Cigarettes* too there's this discovery – it's really up to the reader, but the materials are there – the discovery through the narrative that the narrator is Lewis, which

means that this book has been told by this *creep*, who thereby is transformed: now he's not only *not* a creep, he becomes a monument of compassion. That he's been able to recreate himself in the midst of all these other people; that plus the last passage on death, which sends you back... It's not closed off, you cannot *not* rethink the book if you're reading, assuming that one is involved the way I indicated earlier. And that's what the books have in common, they cannot *not* be read, every sentence really has to be played over the tongue silently. You can't sum it up. You have really to stay involved in the process of reading.

The point you raised about knowing what I was doing – I said yes and no, and the yes is: there's a lot of modernist and so-called postmodernist theory that I've always found rather stimulating and exciting, which has helped me think that I knew for a few minutes what I was doing, which is enough; but really where I work is as a cobbler, an artisan, out of the things that are lying nearby. I don't really know and I don't really want to know in that sense. What I need is to have it taken care of. Contemporary theory is something I bounce off or use sometimes, in talk and critical writing. Analogically, Oulipian procedures are both totally gratuitous and totally self-justifying, there's no earthly point in using them, and once you decide to use one of them all you have to do is follow the rules of the game, which provides the benefits of furnishing an abstract way, a path, a place to go. At the same time it's apparently very neutral. I know it does involve a whole attitude towards writing, but it doesn't have a particular ideological commitment. One of our members once said that a communist would happily express a fascist point of view in a palindrome if he could get the palindrome to work – you'd sell your soul! I think this is very liberating, because it's an extreme way of getting you to do things or to say things you wouldn't say or do otherwise.

EB: There seems to be present an attitude that arises out of some sort of generalised panic: really you're trying to contain the panic but you need it and feed off it. In Roussel's most morbid writings, everything is there except the spark of life, he's almost shaking the corpses...

HM: Which is what makes it so moving, what gives Roussel this weird lunar illumination... this tremendous dead weight, the weight of dead things, which is just as real as any other kind of weight. But you're absolutely right: both for Perec and myself, the Oulipo served this function, with the big difference that in his case he felt rootless, exiled, orphaned – he was all those things – and the Oulipo provided a way of putting words in his mouth;

whereas I was coddled, over-educated, my mouth was stuffed with all too many words and the Oulipo provided a way of being able to speak despite this mass of cultural bilge. But it's quite true, using these procedures is a reaction against the fright, the terror of the act of writing, "the way you feel". That's why it is important for me to make this distinction about the reader being the creator - because when you write, you feel as though you were putting yourself down onto the page, and it is clearly not so: it's words that you have no choice about really. You can choose which ones to put down but the language is there, *speaking you* most of the time.

I remember when I first had to get undressed at a gym class, in front of others. I was an only child, and that feeling that I was truly exposing myself to some extraordinary danger, even though it may have been just dangerous looks, is very much like that experienced in writing: as though I was showing my secret shameful parts to the world, maybe, unless I was very careful... all that is going on when you sit down to write. The Oulipo is wonderful, an antidote, a way of blowing away the problem, because if you're following a difficult procedure, this clearly isn't *you*, can't possibly be *you* - it's this impersonal thing, right? You know, like not using the letter E or only using a very small vocabulary of 185 words as in "These words for you" (*The Way Home*). Clearly, in this situation, I'm no longer at risk. There's this hard problem to solve and that's what I'm busy doing, solving the problem.

Furthermore, the wonderful thing about Oulipian procedures is that they don't interfere with one's presence on the page (presence in the sense that one recognises individual authors, Henry James or Jane Austen, for instance, when they write). If you and I both did a lipogram, or wrote a page without using the letter E, I can *swear* that anyone familiar with the way you write or the way I write would recognise whose writing it was immediately - and probably more so than if we were just writing any old way. There is both the liberation from anxiety, from the personal danger one feels one is incurring in writing; and at the same time a safeguarding of that personal quality of thought that shows up as a disposition of rhythm and form, whatever. And when I've used these Oulipian procedures in my writing classes, even snowballs (in which the first word consists of one letter, the second word of two letters, and so forth), even there - using what is most infantile, elementary kind of restrictive procedure - even there people come through: their so-called *voice* is there. So the whole project of the Oulipo is very exciting. I don't think I've ever very well understood the contrast people feel impelled to make

between Oulipian ways of writing and freedom - of self-expression on the page. In fact, certainly for Percec and myself, I can swear they have proved the guarantee of our being free.

EB: A similar argument has been levelled against serialism in music, more justifiably perhaps. Ultimately, even where you have taken away all apparent structures, you cannot truly escape structure.

HM: That's right. At least you have a chance this way. I agree with you totally that you cannot get away from structure in anything - in fact, another exercise I use with my students is to ask them to write something without any structure to it, which via syntax means with no meaning - and it can't be done, no student has ever been able to write a sentence that wasn't interpretable. So there's structure anyway, built into language, even in the case of MacLow and Coolidge. There's always a structure of some kind, usually several structures, present in anything that's written; and if you don't make a choice about that, those structures are most certainly going to run you and you are going to be doing what they allow. So at least if you choose your own structure, an initial element of freedom enters the picture. At least you can say, *All right I'm going to follow a structure, I'm going to subject myself to a structure, but I'm going to say what it is* - and in fact once one has taken that step a great many exciting consequences follow. One of them apparently being - and this is something I can't really explain, it just seems to me to be the case - that works produced by these difficult, often invisible, structures engender potentialities of interpretation. The interpretations of *Life a User's Manual* should in no way be reduced to the schemes that Percec gave himself to enable the book to get written. It's far richer than that. I think it's a book that will repeatedly yield readings, insights and so forth. In the *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Thomas Mirkowicz, a brilliant man who won a prize for his translation of *The Conversions* in Poland, wrote an article about it in which not only did he discover virtually everything that I'd put into the novel in terms of ideas, myths, ideas from the history of religion and witchcraft, he also discovered in it so much more - things that weren't there. And you can't say he was wrong, even though I didn't know that those things might be reflected in what I was writing. Getting involved in rigorous uses of erudition apparently automatically creates reverberations and suggestions, things which he exploited. I didn't know what he would be able to exploit but this method of linking material of different kinds in an arbitrary way creates values.

Somehow connected with that is the process which the

surrealists were trying to realise, but to my mind almost never succeeded in realising, namely to allow the experience of your unconscious to make itself manifest in what you write. The surrealists approached this rather directly, writing down dreams, writing with drugs, writing in semi-waking states, all of it quite interesting – but it doesn't look to me like the unconscious. I think that in a book like George Perec's *La Disparition*, the novel which he wrote without using the letter E, where he was driven to spending many many months just finding out what he could say, what he could do in terms of putting a book together – he was so busy dealing with this ferocious problem that he wasn't bothering with his unconscious at all, and yet it wrote itself plain. When one has the terror I was talking of before, of exposing oneself on paper, the last thing you want to have show up is what not even

in the Oulipo ever says that. In fact the Oulipo itself is not involved in writing, it's involved in doing research, in discovering and exploring forms, structures, constrictive procedures. Writing is up to the individuals.

EB: I was going to ask how far you'd follow a particular structuring device – I'm thinking of Roussel's elaborate explanation in *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, where he ends by stating that after all, "Sometimes I didn't do this at all". He doesn't say where or why.

HM: Roussel didn't tell the whole truth. Clearly there's more going on.

EB: Yes. In your novels, did you abandon the structure at any time?

HM: The principle of abandoning the structure is built into Oulipian thought, it's called the clinamen. The clinamen is Lucretius's word for the way atoms deviate from their straight lines as they fall. Without this there would be no matter, the atoms would never touch. And the clinamen is very much accepted in Oulipian practice, but not as part of a structure. It's part of the Oulipian way of looking at structure. I think the most conspicuous and most interesting instance of an Oulipian writer abandoning a structure, whatever one it was, is Queneau's *Pierrot Mon Ami*. We don't know how Queneau wrote his novels, all we know is that they were highly structured, probably having structures of a numerical kind, sequences of prime numbers, something like that. In any case, he said that when he got to the end of *Pierrot Mon Ami* it was quite possible for him to respect the structure that he'd

given himself in writing the book, and he found himself facing the choice of doing that, which was quite acceptable, but in doing so he might have taken a lot of the breath out of the book, a lot of life out of it. So here he had the choice of doing that or leaving the life there by abandoning the structure, and abandon it is what he did. We don't know exactly where. When I was once teaching the book I saw a little bit where it was happening, I think it's in the last chapter. He had the sense to follow not the initial structure but the resulting structure, as it were: he allowed the consequences of his work to create their own appropriate form. And I think you'd have to be an *idiot* to do anything else.

An Oulipian structure is interesting as a structure. The *Absent Fair* is an elegant idea just in itself. It doesn't necessarily yield good results. We didn't know before using

you know is inside you, all that unknown stuff.

Of course it does manifest itself, in various ways, but you do everything you can to prevent it doing so. The conscious censor is very much present. For instance, one does not admit to having matricidal desires, really. In *La Disparition*, Georges is so extraordinarily present. Not the Georges I knew, but whatever else was in him, all that anguish about his past, his parents, being a Jew, all the things he never mentioned to me, *all* is manifest in the story the book tells. So the Oulipo has its advantages in this as well.

Making available unconscious goings-on on the page is also connected with the potentiality of interpretation. You mentioned serialism in music. One big difference between us (the Oulipo) and Schoenberg is that Schoenberg said, *This is the only way to write*; and no one

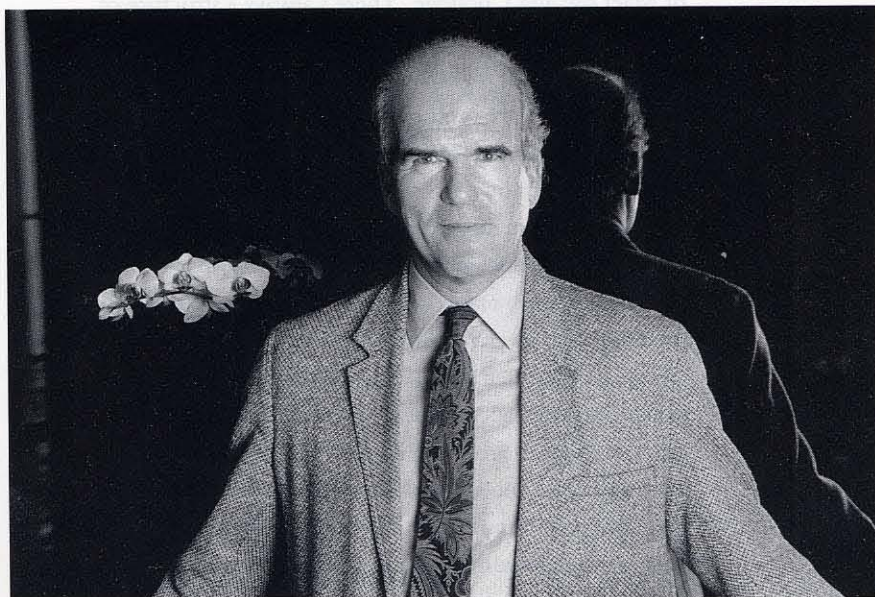


Photo: ©John Foley

it whether it would or not, some people would probably find it useless - I've found it at times extremely stimulating. Recently I extended it into a series of five-line stanzas, in which I used as the Absent Fair the vowels of the alphabet: there are no As in the first line, no Es in the second... and the thirty-sixth and last line contains all the vowels. I like it because it's invisible, the form becomes invisible. You could not hear or see this form because it's based on what is not there. That in a sense is what the Oulipo looks for in a structure.

The point is not to make something that will be immediately useful for writers, but to invent or rediscover an elegant structure and make it available to writers. But there is no guarantee that writing in an Oulipian manner will produce good writing. One can take the most elegant structure, or the most demanding structure, and it can come out junk. Take the celebrated E-less novel called *Gadsby*, written in the 1930s by an American, Wright: it is 50,000 words long - not very long but long enough, he clearly can do it, can write without *Es*. Well, it's absolutely devoid of any interest whatsoever. Whereas when Percec used the same device it was a kind of cold fusion. So, there is a misunderstanding of the Oulipo: we're non-combative, we don't go out and make a big noise.

EB: Where would the British reader find out more about the Oulipo? Is there much in translation?

HM: There is a book published in America by Warren Motte. There hasn't been much in translation. There's little bits and pieces. Presumably there'll be more, at least in America. We were invited to do a colloquium in New York on the occasion of the appearance of *Cigarettes*, *Life a User's Manual* and Jacques Roubaud's novel *A Beautiful Heroine* - they were coincidentally published in the fall of 1987 and we had a two-day colloquium.

EB: In the last few months I've read, *Life*, *Cigarettes* and *W...*

HM: All pretty gloomy.

EB: Yes, that's partly why I asked you earlier about this sense of panic I feel is evident in much of this material.

HM: *Life* I find a really troubling book, that ending, the whole book dissolving in those last pages: you realise that everything, the masses of tales, stories, human experi-

ence, *stuff*, all of it was just being presented for the moment in which this happens. But panic I don't see.

All that order gets undone at the end, that's the point. It's far vaster in effect, but is analogous to what I did in my first two books - especially *Tlooth* - which is to create elaborate structures which turn out to be meaningless, which all collapse and disappear.

In *W* Percec was dealing with the unspeakable, and the unspeakable is even present in those four dots in the middle of the book, where the fiction becomes the story of the Olympic society. *La Disparition* is the comic embodiment of all that, it's really scary material, but it's so lively and clearly not meant to be realistic in any way. All kinds of things are going on, but in fact it's about people disappearing, being destroyed by this Oulipian god. But I don't think it is panic in those books. Rather, there's

an acknowledgment of loss. Are your parents alive?

EB: Yes.

HM: That's what divides the human race. There are two kinds of people in the world: those who've lost one or both of their parents and those who haven't. It happens all the time, they get ill and die, nobody is surprised. There's this event - probably the most important event in one's life, it seems: it doesn't have to be good or bad or anything, it is just monumental, and one's feelings about them make no difference. Your whole relationship to life is radically altered. With luck transformed, but that isn't automatic. Maybe the acknowledgment of loss looks

like panic.

Harry Mathews currently has two volumes in preparation: a collection of his verse is to be published by Carcanet Press later this year; and a new anthology of Oulipian writing, edited by Mathews, will be published by Atlas Press.

FURTHER READING:

Immeasurable Distances: The Collected Essays, Harry Mathews (The Lapis Press, 1991)

The American Experience, Harry Mathews (Atlas Press, 1991)

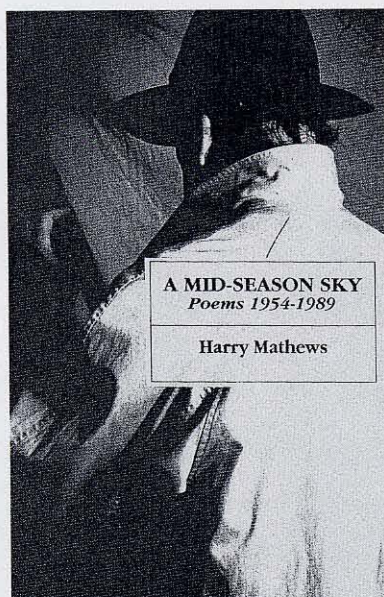
The Way Home: Collected Longer Prose, Harry Mathews (Atlas Press, 1989)

Twenty Lines a Day, Harry Mathews (Dalkey Archive Press, 1988)

Cigarettes, Harry Mathews (Carcanet Press, 1987)

Life a User's Manual, Georges Perec, trans. David Bellos (Collins Harvill, 1987)

Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature, ed. Warren F Motte Jr (University of Nebraska Press, 1986)



Women's Art Practice / Man's Sex

...and now for something completely different

Naomi Salaman

The question, 'what is pornography for women?' is not new, but until recently it has not been given much serious time. The anti-pornography feminist concern has been about regulating men's access to images of women, while the anti-censorship groups have mainly concentrated on defending and celebrating gay sexualities, and on countering police and state homophobia. Whilst gay and lesbian voices have been forthright in defending their right to a sexuality, and their right to look, 'straight' feminism has been quite quiet and confused. In this article I want to point to some of the more persistent arguments in the anti-pornography campaigns and relate them to a blind spot in the theory and practice of women looking at men. Why is the representation of the man's sex so regulated, so prone to a complex of cultural resistance?

The question, 'what is pornography for women?' is at least three questions: What is pornography?, what is 'women', and what is it in the pornographic text which marks it as 'for' a particular audience; is desire predictable and gendered?

I do not wish to answer these questions exactly, but rather to open up the issues raised by pornography in relation to women's visual practice and (erotic) images of men. These are the main concerns of the *What She Wants* project that I am working on towards an exhibition of the same name. It will be of most interest to women who have sexual pleasure with men, but not entirely. What ever your sexual persuasion, or gender you may enjoy fantasies about the male body.

Visual pleasure is a complicated matter, often dismissed by the puritan left and anti-porn feminists. Within a broad political vista, enjoyment of an image does not rank as an urgent matter for consideration. There are always more important things to discuss, always more important things to do, quite apart from the embarrassment. I want to suggest that the arguments used against pornography have a political and moral base which situates visual pleasure as a 'luxury most of us cannot afford', and so puts in place a very simplistic model of how we relate to the image. My argument begins with the assertion that there is no looking at imagery, no vision, without fantasy. And that fantasy is always pleasure seeking.

Some months ago I took part in a *Kilroy* morning TV discussion on pornography for women. The programme researcher was keen to select an audience interested in discussing what women want to look at, and avoiding the polarising sentiments of the anti-pornography campaigns. She wanted to concentrate on what women might enjoy, and to leave the question of what men should or should not look at to one side. This marked a welcome break with the simplistic media treatment of the issues, and a possible beginning of something much more interesting. The anti-pornography campaigns have been taken too long as the 'feminist view': their short-sighted, ill-informed anti-image rhetoric has been taken as a voice of 'concern', and even worse, a voice of 'reason'.

I was pleased to be on *Kilroy* that day, with other artists and journalists to platform a different approach to the issue of pornography. Women artists have little or no visual traditions of eroticising the male body, yet the market for women's erotica is opening up: so I see it as an important time for women artists/photographers to take up the space and time to discuss and create around these issues.

Coreen Sweet, a journalist who has worked for the Campaign against Pornography and Censorship, said on the programme, "*erotica is fine... but pornography is bad because it makes sexism sexy.*" The idea that there is a safe distinction between erotica and pornography is a familiar tenet in the anti-pornography campaigns. To suggest erotica is good, pornography bad, is just plain nonsense. If you find some pornography exciting, then it will be erotic for you. The erotic is a larger field than the pornographic as it is about one's relationship to the image, as well as what the image depicts. Objects termed erotic are an endless variety from primitive sculpture to food to stockings. The pornographic on the other hand as **Linda Williams** argues in her new book, *Hard Core*, is a specific genre which has developed with the technology of photography as a tradition of representing the body's secret sexual pleasures. Williams suggests that the genre of pornography is a coincidence of 'visible frenzy': the fascination of photographic truth, together with a narratives of the bodily urges to confess sexual pleasure. It's a powerful combination which so far has been in the con-

trolling hands of men. To say that 'pornography makes sexism sexy' is a clever media sound bite that means nothing. The sexism of the pornography industry is that it mainly represents women's sex for a male audience. This dynamic is not a result of pornography, it is much more than that, it is deeply embedded in our culture; in our hearts and minds. The tradition of representing women as beautiful object to be looked at by men, inflects a gender division in the process of looking. When women interrupt this expectation they encounter more problems than might be expected. Power relations are disturbed that ordinarily help us to know who we are. I think this confusion can be a radical addition to the energy of women's erotica. At the same time I do not want to underestimate the concerns women have here. Coreen Sweet went on to say that as pornography was bad, what we really needed was "something completely different".

I've called this article *And now for something completely different*, after her suggestion, and I would like to think about what this means in terms of making images. What is an image that is completely different? What is an erotic photograph that is completely different from others? Have you seen one? Would you be able to make one? How would you start? A daunting task. Any photography, media or art student would be able to tell you that there is no such thing as a photograph that is completely different, that is at the same time a recognisable photograph of something. Photography is a signifying practice, a system of signs that is able to make meaning through the use of conventions, through reference and through context. The plea for something different made by Sweet is understandable, as women may not want the conventional meanings of pornography to be associated with their work, but at the same time it is very problematic for the woman artist. The avant garde is a phenomenon in art history that has claimed the area of innovation at the same time as persistently excluding women as practitioners. We know from *Old Mistresses*, by **Griselda Pollock** and **Rosika Parker**, that the very idea of originality is itself a gendered domain.

While Coreen Sweet's comments misunderstand signification and tradition, the sentiments she expresses are relevant to the general reluctance and resistance that many women feel about the word pornography and the idea of producing it. As the practice and theory of women's erotica develops I would question any line which insists that women's practice must be different, and advise any woman producing erotic images of men to study what has already been done and to go on from there.

In **Simon Watney's** book *Policing Desire*, published in

1987, he clearly dismantles the visual/political theories at root in the anti-pornography campaigns. He goes on to suggest that we stop using the word pornography because of the moral discourse it inevitably describes. Yet many women feel strongly torn and caught with up what the word means for them. By getting rid of the term pornography we wont get rid of the problems associated with it. And for women these have been quite specific and different to the problems Simon Watney describes. As a gay man he has (presumably) access to a wealth of pornographic magazines produced for the gay markets. He argues that this material should not be censored and can be liberating: indeed HIV information can be life saving, and I agree. However as a woman, my only access to erotic images of men has up until recently been these same magazines.

At the end of the chapter on Pornography and AIDS, Simon Watney quotes a gay man in America as having said, 'To hate porn is to hate sex, ...porn tells us that sexuality is great, and in an age of AIDS that is an important message to hear.' At the time of reading this it stuck in my mind as something I could understand politically and yet made me feel very uneasy. From my point of view, the pornography that I had seen did not tell me that my sexuality was great. My feeling about pornography has been charged with rage and guilt. Rage at how women are depicted, guilt that the only place I can look is supposed to be for gay men. I have wanted to obliterate pornography because it does not include me as an active spectator, it does not address me and my visual pleasures. This overlaps with Watney's suggestion that we should avoid the term in debate. Avoidance is different from the wish to obliterate, which I have known, and I see as a recurrent theme in the anti-pornography campaigns.

I don't think we can afford to abandon the term pornography before we fully understand the industry and practices of visual production that it describes. Women have a class differentiated history of inclusion and exclusion here which needs to be properly articulated. Good women are not expected to enjoy looking at pornography, bad women are represented in it in the throes of sexual excitement. The term pornography has meaning for women because of the specific way the ideology of femininity has been structured, allowing women to be included as image and excluded as spectator.

THE CHIPPENDALES ARE AN ILLUSION

I want to move onto another comment that came up on Kilroy. **Joan Scanlan** from the Campaign against

Pornography, described the phenomenon of the Chippendales and other male strip bands as fitting into a recognisable pattern in which women are given an 'illusion' of equality, which does not reflect the real and hard won political struggles that women are engaged in. Obviously the Chippendales are more than just an illusion, they are a booming industry, but, without wanting to totally disagree with Dr Scanlan, I would like to look at the use of the phrase 'illusion of equality' here and relate it back to the original question of visual practice. Art practice is the production of illusions. For Dr Joan Scanlan, illusions are to be scrutinised: they trick and deceive. I think it is interesting that Dr Scanlan's argument puts popular entertainment and illusion on one side and real political struggle on the other. An alternative to this opposition between the real (struggle), and the illusory (pleasure), is to consider illusions, not as true or false, but as representation in a politics of representation. If the Chippendales are an 'illusion of equality' for women, then what does this equality look like? What pleasures are on offer? Is a woman's active sexuality being addressed? I think illusions are a way of speaking about our desires. In fact I think they are all we have.

Sitting on my notice board is a copy of an art magazine cover from Canada called *Parallelogramme*. It is an edition dating from 1987 on censorship and the cover shows an Egyptian temple of closed tulip capitols. They have been

tinted pink and stand out as phallic. Underneath is written 'Ceci n'est pas un pénis'. It summed up something of the colliding concerns that have been motivating my interests in sexuality, language and representation. The connections made are condensed; it would take me pages and pages to articulate them. In fact it sparked off a train of thought before I could articulate it.

I designed the dildo card, 'Ceci n'est pas un pénis', last year as a cover for a research questionnaire about images of men. I wanted to take the references on the *Parallelogramme* cover a stage further. I wanted to use a photograph of a dildo to talk about an erection; to talk about desire and the phallus. The **Magritte** reference on the original cover is a clever way to implicate fantasy as being part of looking and language. In the painting, *The Tyranny of Images*, by Magritte, of a pipe and the text below, 'this is not a pipe' below, neither the image nor the text contain the pipe but both circulate a fantasy about it. Both are not 'it', but make reference to it. The text implies not being it, in a way that the image cannot. But the painting of the pipe can look like a pipe while at the same time stand for something else. It is precisely the way that this image-text can be 'not a pipe' yet signify pipe and a whole set of other associations, displacements and substitutions, that is the tyranny of the image. It is this fantasy about the object that I wanted to play on in the dildo image-text. It is not so much the object which exists here as a fanta-

Photo: Grace Lau

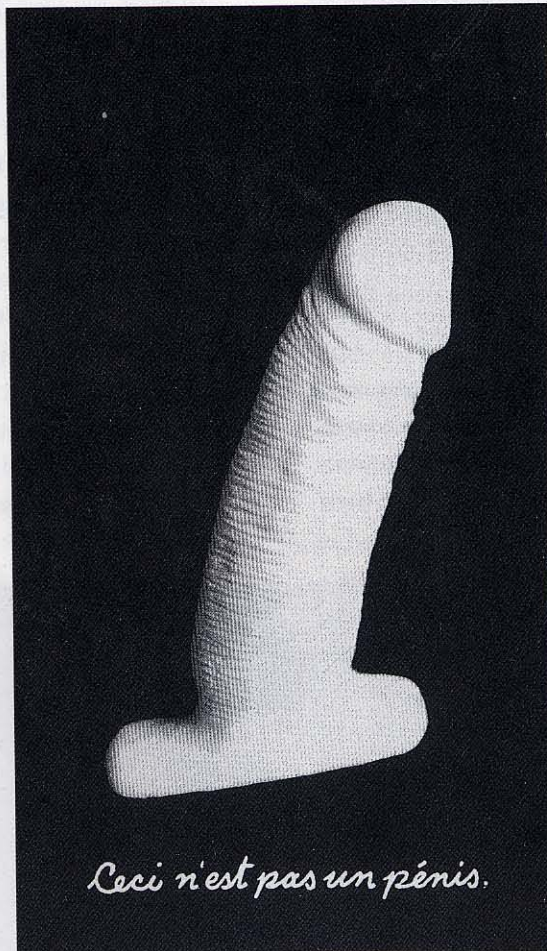


Photoworkshop

sy about an absent object. Just as the picture of the pipe is not the pipe, so the penis is not the dildo is not the phallus. And yet the fantasy that the erect penis is actually the phallus persists and indeed gives pleasure.

The history of how the dildo card got made, while being a bit anecdotal is quite interesting to relate in the context of the lost object, and the problematic of women representing the man's sex. The photograph I used for the card was taken by **Della Grace**, who, not wanting to lend me one of her prosthetic devices, offered to photograph one for me if I explained what I wanted and agreed to buy her dinner. She then sent the prints in the post across London. They never arrived. She sent some more. They also failed to materialise. I felt paranoid and noticed that all my mail was arriving pre-opened. I blamed myself for ringing up the vice squad a few weeks earlier to ask them about interpretations of the Obscenity Legislation. They took my telephone number, and so had access to my address.

I met Della in town and she passed me over the prints. Honestly, I felt as though we were going to get busted, all for a photograph of a dildo! Next I went to a bureau to scan the image into my computer. The Mac operator was highly amused and mentioned a friend of his. As a result I met **Rosie Gunn**, who at the time was finishing off her BA essay entitled, *Undress the Man, Redress the Balance*. We are now working together on the exhibition *What She Wants*. When I took my completed disk back to the bureau to be output on bromide, the dildo image disappeared again, the computer refused to read it, and kept printing out a black page with a blank space. One of the workers was able to re-find the original (?) scanned image, but as a result lost the manipulation, the scaling and shading work that I had done to it. He redid it for me, adding a touch of flair, being a bit of an expert. He sat at the screen smiling, professing his love and knowledge of male anatomy while he performed a visual hand job on the digital dick using a smudge tool, represented by a finger rubbing icon. You can imagine the scene: the office halted into hilarity.



I started off my research for *What She Wants* cautiously envious of gay male culture and the eruption of sex celebration that seems to be taking place. Over the last few years I have met many women interested and involved with issues of sexuality and visual practice. Lesbian artists/activists have become more visible and have moved the debate of representation and lesbian desire on from arguments about the inescapable 'male' gaze, to a more interesting discussion of representing lesbian desire. Women working on images of men are also beginning to make inroads into the debate and are asking questions about how to represent or trace the women's desire for

a man. Most evident from my research for *What She Wants*, is that women really do want to review the situation, and discuss the problems and pleasures of representing the man's sex.

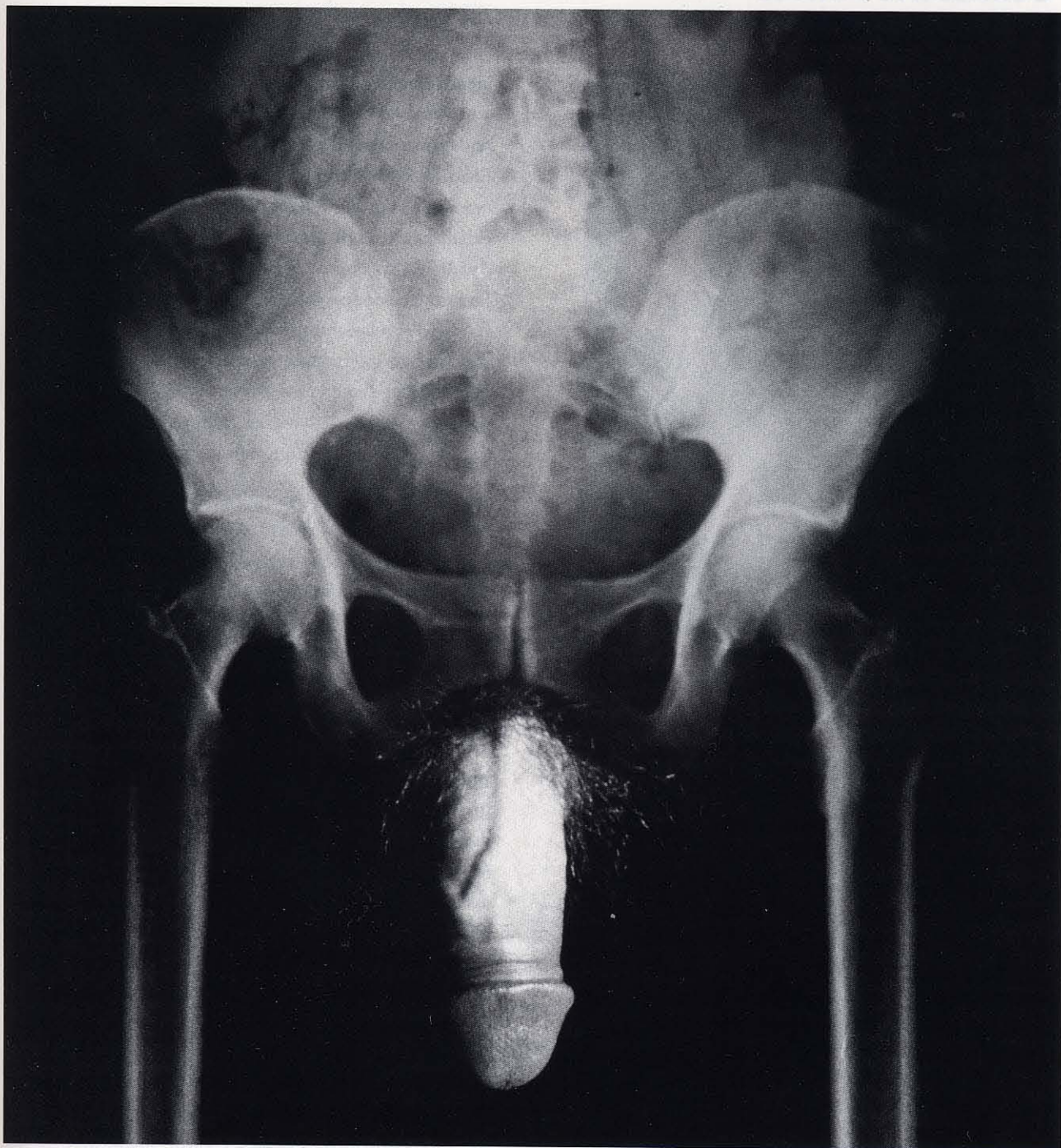
Pornography is a cultural practice which has traditionally excluded women as spectators but has none the less depicted women's sexuality as avid and not reducible to the baby/marriage drive. As a genre its basic idea is that sex is pleasurable and exciting, but not natural. In this sense it is an interesting area for women to explore, and think again about. We have hit upon a unique moment where the pornographic industry wants to capitalise on the new markets for women's pornography. Women photographers are central to the credibility of this new product. I am quite sure that if women artists do get involved then the products will differ from existing pornography. But

to concentrate or to insist that women's work will be something completely different is to miss the point. The difference will be less visible; more out of frame. It will be about who is looking, who is making the images and whether these women will be allowed/will allow themselves to take their visual pleasure seriously.

The *What She Wants* exhibition is scheduled to open next spring in London and then tour Britain.

Early Years

GERALDINE PRINCE



Penis Envy by Naomi Salaman

The first...
 Oliver...
 Clara...
 The first...
 The space...
 23 George...
 The first...

Early Years

GERALDINE PRINCE

Although the *New 57 Gallery* survived as the 'gallery upstairs' above the *Fruitmarket* until the mid-'80s, defining its early history after its founding as the *57 Gallery* is not particularly straightforward.^[1]

Events of 35 years ago are well within the memory of many Edinburgh-based artists, collectors and arts administrators who were involved with the *New 57* at the outset, yet documentation to support recollections is elusive. Information is scattered in personal archives and notebooks, in incomplete *Gallery of Modern Art* files and in assorted envelopes of old preview cards and catalogues, often undated. Some evidence also makes the *57* enterprise seem unexpectedly remote: photographs of exhibiting artists with the loon pants, long hair and Zapata moustaches of the best-forget-it, unstylish '70s; fragile, yellowing, newspaper cuttings which turn out, alarmingly, to date from the late '60s. Beyond this, the substantial gaps might be filled by the contents of a cardboard box, apparently stored at the *Fruitmarket*, but inaccessible for the last 17 months during the gallery's upheaval and closure last year (it re-opens in Autumn 92 with new staff members); that may contain membership and exhibition lists and perhaps the Visitor's Book, signed by William MacTaggart and John Maxwell among others at the opening exhibition *Our Contemporaries* on February 9th, 1957.

A brief account of the gallery accompanied the first *20 by 57* mixed show of gallery artists in 1969; another appeared in 1972 when the gallery mounted *15 Years of the 57 Gallery*: a survey of 57 artists (although only 56 are listed) who had shown at the gallery since its launch. Held at the Edinburgh University's William Robertson Building during the Edinburgh Festival, the show's catalogue, more substantial than anything previously produced, included brief 'Testimonials' by Daphne Dyce Sharp, Cordelia Oliver, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Alan Bold and Edward Gage, as well as John Busby's history of the gallery's various incarnations.

The first stemmed from the inauguration as an exhibiting space of **Daphne Dyce Sharp's** sculpture studio at 53 George Street, Edinburgh. An elegant Georgian room,

inconveniently located on the second floor, the only sign at street level was a chalked board. Initially intended for both amateurs and professionals, it became - after what Eleanor Ede (secretary in the early days) calls "*a contretemps*" - a professional gallery for artists excluded from Edinburgh's safe or modish *RSA* (Royal Scottish Academy) or commercial market. Run by volunteers (only the custodian was ever paid), it enjoyed an impossibly idyllic relationship with the Arts Council. Like others, Ede stresses the unique, crucial significance of the *57* as virtually the only space where young artists could show their work - the only other gallery, *Aitken Dott's*, was dominated by Edinburgh School painters. There were occasional 'one-off' events and isolated ventures.

'Contemporary art' in Edinburgh consisted of work which in **Cordelia Oliver's** searing view (expressed in 1972) '*could be recognised by an unprejudiced judgement for the irrelevancy it was.*' In the previous decade, 'serious' artists had left Scotland, moving to Paris (Gear and Paolozzi in 1947) and showing in London (Paolozzi, Turnbull and Davie in the early '50s). At the same time, the Edinburgh Festival was dominated by a sequence of exhibitions, outstanding and unquestionably influential, but which foregrounded the 19th century French traditions still dominating much Scottish painting: Degas (1952), Renoir (1953), Cezanne (1954), Gauguin (1955), Braque (1956), and Monet (1957). Beside this, however, the *SSA* (Society of Scottish Artists) was exhibiting work by leading contemporary artists: de Stael, Hartung, Soulages, Lanyon, Pasmore and Gear in 1954, de Stael again in 1956, a Tachisme show in 1958 with Appel, Dubuffet, Francis. Then in 1959, Jim Haynes' *Paperback* bookshop opened near the University as a centre for the avant-garde; the *Traverse Theatre Club* followed in 1963, with the beginnings of the *Richard Demarco Gallery*, dedicated to '*the interpretation and presentation of art...which is unknown, experimental and excellent*'. The late '50s was also the period during which David Baxendall, Director of the *National Galleries of Scotland*, pursued extensive negotiations (initiated before the war) which led to the opening of the *Gallery of Modern Art* in 1961: a further agent in the creation of an audience for contemporary art in Edinburgh.

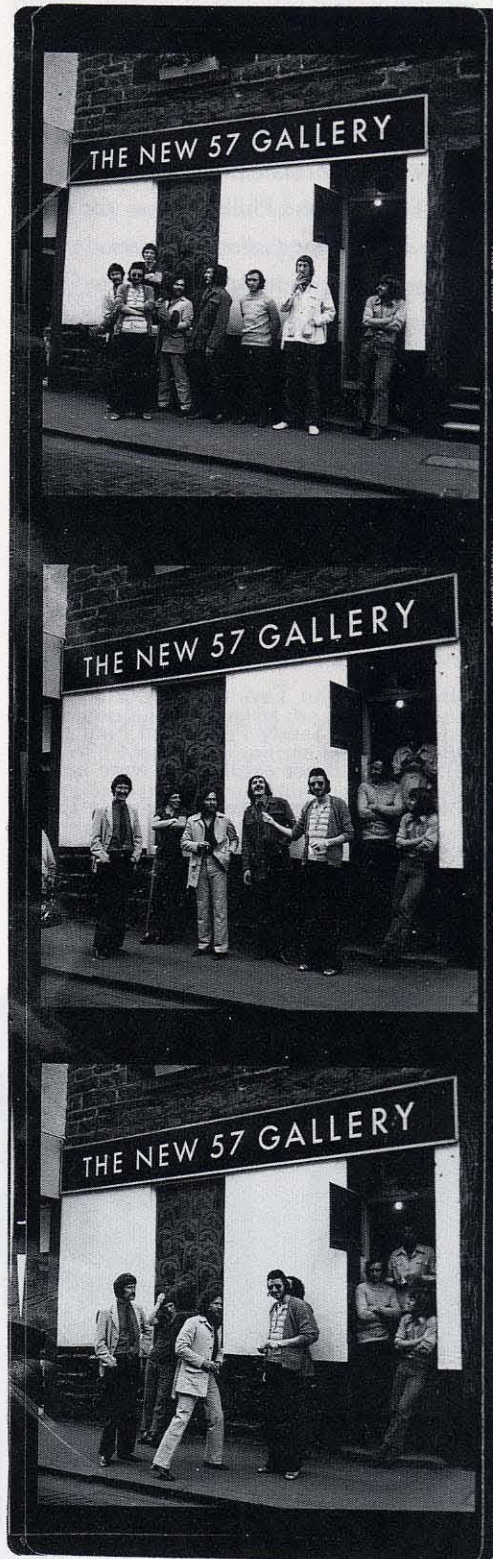
of the 57

The 57 idea thus broke against a background of incipient change, *'filling a very big space with very small dimensions'* as Sydney Goodsir Smith later put it, with *'an importance...out of all proportion to its scale it started quite a big ball rolling...an oasis in Edinburgh's artistic near desert'*. This 'oasis' (improbably described at the 57 opening by an Edinburgh Town Councillor as *"a touch of Montmartre"*) offered the first opportunity for young artists to show work - not on its own enough, in Cordelia Oliver's judgement, to transform Edinburgh's attitudes, but certainly marking *"the very moment of the tide's turning; [it] provided the first shop window for serious and talented questioners of established values"*.

Oliver's views gain resonance from her links with Scotland's own autonomous Modernist project. She remembers visits to Glasgow Art School in the '40s by R.A.M. Stevenson, the longest-lived of the original Glasgow Boys who died in 1952 aged 98. She also knew Jessie M. King and listened to first-hand accounts of discussions with Mackintosh from her grandfather's cousin, heating engineer at Glasgow School of Art. Oliver trained at Glasgow during the war and as a young graduate contributed drawings to *The Glasgow Herald*, encouraged by Reginald Biles, deputy editor and an early feminist. When later she started reviewing, her work was noticed by Brian Redhead, then features editor of *The Guardian* who commissioned reviews of the arts in Scotland. Oliver's articles over 30 years rather debunk the popular theory that national newspaper coverage of Scottish art was somehow 'invented' in the early '80s.^[2]

Oliver's catalogue essays for the 57 (and *New 57*) of which, as a Glasgow-based critic, she was an outside observer, distil the gallery's ethos - an engagement with making and showing work outside what was 'acceptable' within the establishment and a committed inquiry into methods, means and practice. When reviewing work for *The Guardian*, her insights were acutely perceptive, the prose both elegant and rigorous:

"A fairground shooting gallery - perhaps like all fairground art - is a schizophrenic object, and marvellous matter for a pop painter. The public aspect is brilliantly, not to say, luridly invit-



New 57 committee circa 1969/1970

ing and crudely decorative with its layers of edged forms and jerky moving parts. But the rear and private face is sombre and restrained, almost, you might say, resigned to the tedium of its life, and showing its age by the pockmarks from innumerable missed shots. Yet, in a sense, this dark side, in the greys and browns of rods and gears and honest structure, is more beautiful than the other. All this you learn from Robert Callender's show at the New 57 gallery.' (The Guardian, 4.11.68)

According to a gallery statement, 'About the New 57', produced as a duplicated sheet in 1974, the gallery had staged an 'unbroken run' of exhibitions from 1957 to 1965. No complete list of these has yet appeared, but from varied sources one builds up a picture of the 57's programme: Ede recalls shows by Norman Adams, John Bratby, William Gillies, Earl Hair and Phillip Sutton (for which a small catalogue exists in the *Gallery of Modern Art* files); Joan Eardley showed early on leading (according to Oliver) to her subsequent show in London. Alexander McNeish showed from 1957 to 61 in 'Seven Painters'; Alastair Park showed in 1957 and 58 and together they had a 2 man show during the Festival in either 1962 or 63. John Houston (1958) and Elizabeth Blackadder (1959) exhibited. Other exhibitors in the late '50s/early '60s included Gordon Bryce (1957), Charles Pulsford, Pat Douthwaite and Alan Alexander (1958), Ian McKenzie Smith (1959), Rod Carmichael and Ian McCulloch (1960), Bert Irvin and Jack Knox (1961), Tom McDonald, John Busby, Bet Low, John Taylor (1961), Fred Bushe (1962), John Johnstone, Sandy Fraser and Neil Dallas Brown (1964). Two summer exhibitions were held: in 1963 Park, Johnstone, Busby showed alongside Robin Rae, Robert Smith, Alex Campbell, Vivian Alexander, Susan Senior and Ken Dingwall. The following year Dyce Sharp and Sydney Hapley showed sculpture, the remain-

ing space being occupied by Bill Bryden, Madeleine Galloway, Harry More Gordon, Hamish Henderson, Bet Low, Moira Maitland, Dennes Morton, John Taylor and Frances Walker. In spite of all this, however, attendances declined and after the 1965 AGM The Scotsman reported the committee's decision not to renew the George Street lease. At the end of 1965, new premises were acquired at 105 Rose Street, now the Jolly Jean emporium, then a cobbler's shop with 2 rooms and access from the street. With Bob Callender as Chairman from 1966 to the end of 1968 the gallery - metamorphosed into the *New 57* - continued its policy of showing young artists work. According to Callender there was an exceptionally fast turn around - a two-week show was taken down on a Friday afternoon and the next opened that evening. Two or three exhibitions a year would be brought in from outside, balanced with the work of young local artists and group or theme shows. Beyond this, a desire was fulfilled 'to explode the myth of East/West rivalry, and become as much a gallery for young Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Dundee as for Edinburgh artists' (Busby). Certainly a pattern was established which saw *New 57* exhibitors in the late '60s enjoying, or going on to secure, college lectureships throughout Scotland: Phillip Reeves (1965), Glasgow School of Art; George McPherson (1965), Edinburgh College of Art; Gordon Bryce (1966), Grays School in Aberdeen; Dai Evans (1967), Edinburgh; Will McLean (1968), Duncan of Jordanstone in Dundee. Whether a consciously formulated policy or not, the proportion of artists included in the 1972 retrospective who were (or became) college lecturers was remarkable, with over 25% employed at Edinburgh alone, posts which in the main, 20 years later, they still hold. They were also overwhelmingly male, at about the last historical moment

MERZ =

KURT SCHWITTERS

when it was possible for any exhibition wishing to be taken remotely seriously to so markedly under-represent women.

The lectureship 'fast track' almost certainly affected the *New 57* itself as artists who had been given shows at the gallery settled into lectureships, becoming "slightly less interested" in the gallery (Sandy Moffat) and in the 1972 list are several perhaps no longer quite so close to the cutting edge of the avant-garde as they once were, for which the demands of teaching might be responsible. The *New 57* was always open, however, to art from outside: Oliver remembers shows by Norman Adams, Max Ernst, Heartfield, Jim Dine as well as an experimental sound installation by Lachlan McColl.

In late 68, **Sandy Moffat** became Chairman, his notebook meticulously recording every meeting of the Committee from 19 November 1968 when he wrote 'Agree to ask Peter de Francia for festival exhibition' and inscribed other exhibitors' names on a 1969 calendar. His notes consist mainly of dates of meetings and names of committee members. Significantly, a meeting on 12 May 1969 records agreement to hold an additional Festival exhibition at the William Robertson Building (WRB) - the first '20 x 57' show. Under Moffat the *New 57* widened its horizons, in this instance by having a bigger space and, presumably, a larger public. Even though 19 of the 20 exhibitors were Edinburgh trained, nonetheless the intention was to represent 'the most talented and adventurous of the younger artists, working in Scotland and further afield', to create an exhibition which was 'distinctly radical in content eschewing the painterly charm of much of the established Scottish School but without being the purely fashionable avant-garde which mars much of contemporary painting elsewhere.' These comments, valorising painting over other approaches, appeared over the names of Sandy Moffat as Chairman and other committee members - Ian Paterson, Roger Askham, Mark Jones, Kirkland Main and Alan Johnston - a democratic gesture which Moffat consistently pursued. As Oliver noted in her introduction, the artists represented were essentially those who in any year might show in Rose Street (Bellany, Bryce, Cebula, Patterson, Bell, Mooney, Docherty, Evans, Paterson, Main, Fairgrieve, Jones, Lawrence, McLeod, Moffat, Callender, Pretsell, Johnston, Ross and Johnstone: over half also Edinburgh College of Art lecturers). Many appeared again in the 1970 '20 x 57', held once more at the WRB while the Rose Street premises were given over to Beckmann graphics: new names were Richard Easson, Bill Gillon, Jake Kempself and Paul Youngs. Oliver's catalogue essay now recognised the *New 57*'s role as 'a distinguished nursery of good, non-conformist talent'

and pointed out that the battle to secure a market for a non-sensual kind of art was by no means won (not then, not now). Artists who showed in the early '70s included Onwin, Ogilvie, Robson and Roberts and an exhibitions' policy was pursued, even during a period when the *New 57* was without a gallery space, from the end of 1973 until March 1975 when 'Seven Young Artists' inaugurated the new exhibiting space at the Fruitmarket complex. Here the *New 57* remained, after 1978 under **Jim Birrell**, until its complicated merger with the *Fruitmarket Gallery* in 1984.

The *Fruitmarket* phase in the gallery's history marks something of a watershed, setting off the new *New 57* from both the old *57* and the old *New 57*. The latter survive in popular memory and, as far as can be judged, were in reality genuinely exciting and creative environments which gave the overwhelming majority of artists, now the core of Scotland's mid-career practitioners, their first, perhaps only, opportunity to show their work in a professional, critical context: before *Stills*, *369*, *Collective* and others. This continued to the late '70s - in Moffat's lists of potential exhibitors and among his committee members are repeatedly the names of the '70s young Turks who are now the stalwarts of Scotland's teaching establishment. But something had begun to change, notably funding and the attendant relationship with the Scottish Arts Council (set up in 1967).

A burgeoning hostility to the SAC can be traced in the notes of a *New 57* committee meeting in June 1971, the committee's position was summarised as follows: 'Gallery grant inadequate...extra festival grant essential. Demand meeting at Arts Council. Committee totally unsatisfied. All complaints based on what seems to be happening with everyone else concern(ing) grants. The committee feels that it is within our rights to protest publicly about shabby treatment.' This is in marked contrast to the '60s position and is partly explained by the competitive edge introduced by the funding of other Edinburgh galleries (the money allocated to Demarco in particular still rankles). The deterioration in

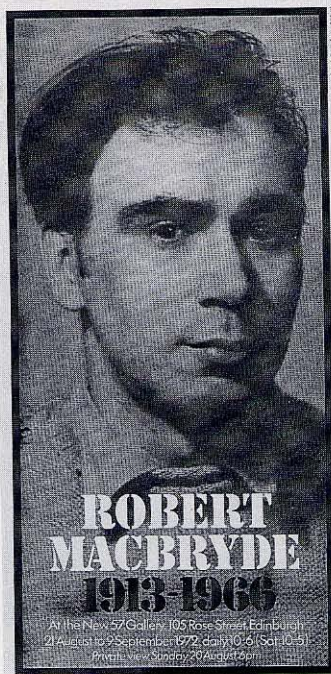


20 by 57 Exhibition, Edinburgh Festival 1970

the initially positive belief that the SAC had been a major catalyst for change is also significant. In the beginning, the SAC "gave people with ideas the possibility of carrying those things out - you didn't have to go through the moribund establishment channels" (Moffat). For Jim Birrell, the SAC and its exhibitions programme offered an "alternative to the RSA, the Scottish Gallery, Art School. The SAC was independent of that...and what they did was very different from the kind of culture that was cultivated in the RSA circle...In that sense, it did open up a perspective that wasn't there before." It was in fact a SAC initiative that they, the *New 57* and the *Printmakers Workshop* should all share the *Fruitmarket* space and they paid for most of the conversion.

Such an expedient arrangement brought with it responsibilities. The need to convince the Arts Council that the *New 57* was more than just a local artists' exhibiting society led to the pursuit of an identifiable balance, both under Moffat and under Birrell, between Scottish artists and artists from outside Edinburgh or Scotland. Moffat noted disquiet in September 1971 that SAC funding policy might imply the 'discouragement of Scottish artists'. Nonetheless, as a result Kitaj had his first show in Scotland at the *New 57* in 1975, the same year that Revolutionary posters collected by Isobel Hilton in China were shown; exchange shows with the Royal College were held in 1976 and 77; Kurt Schwitters, Sylvester Houedard, French Canadian prints and Bert Irvin's work were shown in 1976-77; Marcel Broodthaers and Bernard Lassus in 1977; Barry Flanagan in 1980, and so on, complementing a continuing programme of one-person shows by younger Scottish artists. These included Ogilvie, Kirkwood, Lawrence, Davey, Roberts, Docherty. By Birrell's admission, the quest for adequate funding lead to a shift in exhibitions policy,

the quest for adequate funding lead to a shift in exhibitions policy,



hence architecture, furniture, design, video and shows by Immendorf, Matta Clark, Woodrow, Kosuth - a vigorous policy (they were particularly incensed by an installation by Paul Wood and Dave Rushton, based on the British Leyland strikes). It also marked the final break with the 'first chance' nature of the *57* in its previous 'lives'. This legacy is lodged more with *The Collective Gallery* than anywhere else in Edinburgh and a prime mover was Iain Patterson, former committee member at the *New 57*. He saw *The Collective* as maintaining the commitment to young artists which the *New 57*'s mid-'70s promotion of work by more established artists had deflected. Minutes of a *New 57* Committee meeting on 12 February 1981 record a ratification of an earlier policy decision not to show student work and as it became more difficult for recent graduates to 'get on the ladder' at the *New 57*, Patterson drew art students into preliminary negotiations which led to the opening of *The Collective* in 1984. David Duke, who graduated from Edinburgh that year and then went on to the Royal College, remembers that it was geared to 'young art' and framed as a means by which graduates could negotiate the passage from college to commercial galleries and make East/West connections between Glasgow and Edinburgh, also part of the old *New 57* ideal. What *The Collective* seems to have retrieved is the commitment to showing new, 'untried' art which characterised the early *57* and which outside pressures gradually eroded.

Throughout the '70s, the struggles to increase funding (initiated in 1971) were conditioned by the fact that 'because of initial Arts Council policy we have expanded gallery commitments', as Moffat noted, continuing 'the gallery can't suddenly change overnight into a commercially viable [unit]'. These arguments were singularly successful in that SAC support increased steadily throughout the '70s to reach £19,000 a year by 1981. What this financial growth seems to have squeezed out, however, is the discussion of ideas. Although a reference exists to Lawrence Fricker acting as chairman of art discussions both at the *57* and at *The Traverse* in the '60s, by the 1970's "there were meetings but they were more gripes about the Arts Council not giving them money rather than meetings about art issues" (Birrell). The energy directed into extracting money from the SAC was, of course, fed by a belief still feasible within the cultural climate of the '70s but almost inconceivable now, that the gallery should be almost entirely supported by public funding without consideration of sponsorship or a show's 'commercial' potential. As Birrell puts it, "the

culture then...was about making something that couldn't sell."

What does not survive in the Minutes or other accounts of the 1970's is any sense of engagement with the Devolution debate leading up to the Referendum. The Gallery Report for 1977-78 (written mid-1980), when the Committee included Birrell, Kirkwood, Onwin, Docherty, Moffat and Paterson makes no reference to the relationship of the *New 57* project to either self-determination, or to other broad cultural issues in Scotland, although it does acknowledge the lead and the dynamic for change emanating from the SAC, conditioned by the financial position: *'The SAC's own exhibition programme and vast spending on the Visual Arts had set a new standard of excellence...The gallery's new policy reflected this marked change in the conditions...on the Scottish art scene.'*

The *New 57* stressed the contribution to its own programme made by non-Scottish artists - the 1979 Annual Report mentions shows by Boyd Webb, Kosuth (a show organised by the *Van Abbemuseum* in Eindhoven) and graphic work by the Hungarians, Szabados Arpad and Banga Ferenc. Yet in 1972, in the *'Anniversary Show'* catalogue, Alan Bold had identified the *New 57* as a contributor to the development of Scottish visual culture, one of the *'signs of a spirit of affirmation'*. If this spirit continued implicitly, the arguments were rehearsed more explicitly at the time of *The Fruitmarket's 'Scottish Art Now'* in 1982. In his catalogue essay, Duncan MacMillan expressed resentment at the *'Englishing'* (although he didn't use the word) of Scottish art institutions, despair at the Referendum debacle and a beleaguered conviction that Scottish visual art could still come good:

'Scotland has suffered extreme cultural colonisation in the last generation... Nobody would gain from the final provincialisation of Scotland. As a nation her contribution to the intellectual and cultural history of Europe has been distinguished...[and] has sprung from the complex of ideas, values, and institutions that constitutes identity and not from borrowed opportunities... The crisis of modern art as a whole is one of values and so of function. In Scotland the analogy between that crisis and the crisis of the nation without leadership, as it enters the reality of the post war world, is peculiarly sharp.'

Scottish Art Now coincided with *Expressive Images* at the *New 57*, an important show featuring the emergent generation of new figurative painters: Murdena Cambell, Steven Cambell, Simon Fraser, Alastair Hearsom, Scott Gilmour, Mario Rossi and Andrew Walker and, in Birrell's view, the contrast between the critical success of *Expressive Images*, as compared to that of *Scottish Art Now* *"finished off"* the SAC as exhibition makers at the *Fruitmarket*. These two shows mark the point at which

the *Fruitmarket* and the *New 57* began to dissolve into one another, effectively terminating the contribution of a gallery which had been proudly, even heroically, the first, best chance for young artists to show work in Edinburgh at a time when the Modernist project had no other foothold. Like the other galleries which followed it, its problems seem to have been dominated by funding - lack of it, how to secure it, what to do to guarantee it - considerations which have instigated the various traumas of Edinburgh galleries in the most recent past.^[3] Yet in 1962 it was possible for Phillip Sutton to show work at the *57 Gallery*, presumably with a realistic hope of selling, priced at 240 guineas, a figure which 30 years later would have been considered quite respectable at the *369 Gallery's* recent auction to raise funds for its Education and Artist Exchange programme. Cynical attitudes to arts funding and to the *'value'* of the visual arts and the deification of profit have left their legacy: uncertainty, distrust, jockeying for position in the funding stakes. Replacing the optimism and relatively untrammelled creative energy of the old *57* days, it serves as a testament to the distorted ideologies which allowed the '80s to be categorised as the decade when you could buy two Westminster cemeteries and a pint of lager and still get change from a pound.

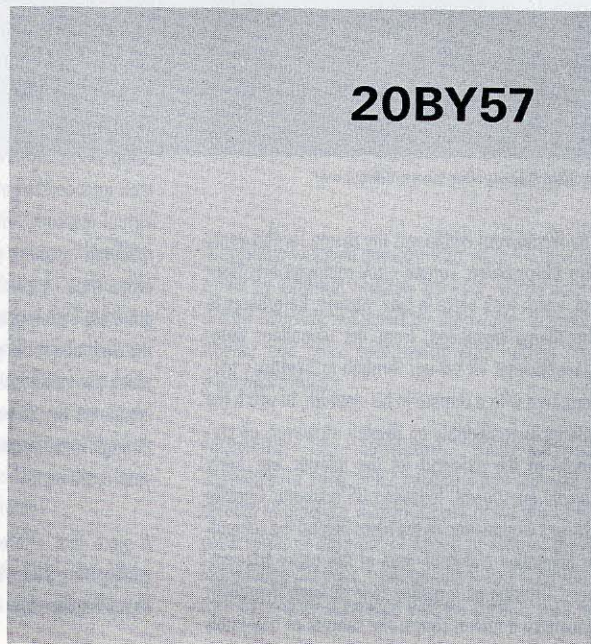
Footnotes:

1. I have drawn on a number of sources for this article, including catalogues, notebooks and other documentation which Malcolm Dickson kindly made available to me (via Sandy Moffat). This included the typescript of an interview he had carried out with Sandy Moffat and Jim Birrell on 4.9.89. I have drawn on this substantially and I am very grateful to him for letting me see it and for asking me to write this article. I have also made use of the Gallery of Modern Art files and am grateful to Fiona Pearson and Anne Simpson for their help. Eleanor Ede wrote a brief account of the early days of the *57* for me to see. Bob Callender, Iain Patterson, David Duke and George Donald provided further helpful information.

2. I am particularly indebted to Cordelia Oliver for spending a great deal of time answering my questions and sharing her insights and recollections.

3. The *Fruitmarket's* own history needs to be explored separately as does the development of the *Printmakers Workshop*, which experienced funding battles and identity crises related to the commercialisation debate throughout the '70s. Another element that requires exploration is the history of the *Ceramic Workshop*, an exciting, highly avant-garde environment by the *Smiths* which has a meteoric existence in Edinburgh as well as an enormous impact.

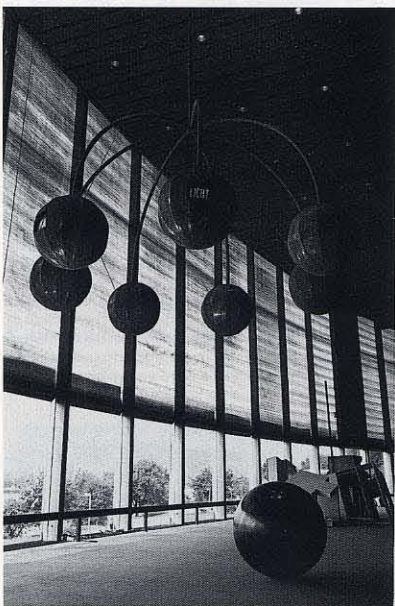
Catalogue Cover, 1970



R E P O R T S

Ars Electronica

June 22nd - 27th, Linz, Austria.



Michael Bielicky 'Der Innere Beobachter'

The World from Within was the theme for this year's **Ars Electronica**, Europe's key computer arts festival, which took place in Linz, Austria. References to the theme abounded, from the ubiquitous data-glove/helmet VR set-ups through to **Stelarc's** performance with a camera in his stomach, in which the interior is formidably on display. However, all certainty of the existence of the interior was fairly rapidly questioned, following US animator **Charlie Gunn's** explanation of the ideas behind the computer animation *Not Knot* - one of this year's prizewinners. Offering us a guided tour through hyperbolic geometry it makes simple the concept of anti-knots

and flying through right-angled dodecahedral tessellations of hyperbolic space. Or so he said.

The problem that many of these works encounter is typified by *Not Knot*. We seem fascinated by the look and the spectacle but seem unable to find much of ourselves within it. *The World From Within* seems to be about the world as seen by the sterile eye of the computer camera as much as any human view. A large-scale performance by **Kirsti Allik** and **Robert Mulder** from Canada attempted to depict the 'basic contradictions associated with human awareness' by miming in white suits alongside large scale projections of computer generated images. They managed to include all the key elements like 'interactive', 'multidisciplinary' and 'Steven Hawking' into their catalogue notes, but I found it vaguely reminiscent of *Vision On* set to the soundtrack of Darth Vader's spaceship directly overhead.

The festival featured the works of over fifty artists in many media and divided the work up into Computer Graphics, Computer Animation, Interactive Art & Computer Music. The festival was obviously well supported in that way only middle-Europeans know how, with buses to all venues and the occasional chilled Austrian bubbly on arrival. The infrastructure was all there, with plentiful, well researched notes and well-run events. It all reeked of the high art world at work, calling the shots with its credence undiminished by commercial compromise. But it's a sad footnote to these events that the British experience will never match this, while most of us still feel horribly guilty about spending this much money on something which **Peter Weibel** (on the festival jury) describes as "transcending the local event horizon". I guess by this he means computer art allows us to see beyond (as he says) the "prison of space and time". If so, I'm still waiting to be convinced that we are ready to be let out.

Some works, however, did begin to chip away at their intended targets. **Jeffrey Shaw** offered us a Virtual Museum, with a cool trip through a finely rendered computer museum courtesy of a wired up office chair, a rotating platform and a whacking great big Silicon graphics workstation. By sitting on the chair and rocking or spinning it, the platform on which you are positioned rotates. As you move, the image on the screen in front of you guides you through some beautiful virtual exhibits in time with your movements.

A piece that offered us another form of graphic quality was **Jean-Louis Bossier's** *Globus Oculi*. Using the computer like a personal snapshot album,

the work allowed us to elegantly flick through a series of short Quicktime animations which were triggered by a trackerball pointer. If we placed the pointer beneath a child's chin, for example, we heard and seen her chuckle.

The installations were spread across two main venues in Linz. The modern Brucknerhouse concert hall, in a small park overlooking the Danube, and the classical Landesmuseum Francisco Carolinum. Various other venues were also used, such as the ORF (Austrian Broadcasting) studios and a spectacular church high on a hill overlooking the town, reached by a cute wooden funicular railway. The festival also made some attempt at a historical perspective with exhibits of milestones in software (including Tetris, After Dark and an anonymous virus) plus an extensive trawl through someone's garage to produce a large museum of experimental video and audio hardware. It's very strange to see the kind of thing I last saw propping up shelves at LVA being tastefully presented within natty perspex cabinets. Some of the pieces had been brought back to life and allowed a degree of interactivity, so the place was full of Austrian schoolkids playing D.I.Y Nam June Paik.

It was a large festival, with stacks of hardware, and was pervaded by a strange kind of artificial showmanship which demands that you put up a screen to hide the hardware, but you leave a gap so everyone can look behind to see how it's done. A festival like this is part train-spotting, part fearless aphorisms, with computers being seen as something unified, a single tool with some common approach for its users, and a notion that being a technological paradigm, it must also be an artistic paradigm. It's intriguing how long this approach can be sustained as the various branches meander off in their own direction, often making more successful reference to their lineage, not to their technological base.

However, it has to be said that his festival did still retain an air of experiment and eccentricity, with scientists talking about art, and artists remembering their O'Levels. With creditable installations by **William Seaman**, **Agnes Hegedus** and **Christopher Steffner**, the art was well-represented, but personally I am still trying to decipher the nanotechnology seminar with **Richard Dawkins**. It seems likely that, if it has anything in common with hyperbolic geometry, I will need to direct my imagination, as it says in the programme, 'into the very bowels of the material'.

CLIVE GILLMAN

One Minute TV 1992

Broadcast June 1992, The Late Show in association with ACGB.

The third batch of ten one-minute films and tapes co-produced annually by the Arts Council of Great Britain and The Late Show was broadcast on the 9th and 10th of June 1992. As in previous years the work varied widely both in style and quality, although - broadly speaking - there has been a disappointing lack of work which engages with or confronts TV as an institution.

To master the one minute time-span requires considerable discipline and few pieces if any had been shaped as genuine miniatures, most having the appearance of being extracts from larger works.

The notable exception this year was **John Smith's** *Gargantuan* which was not only the right length for the idea but actually incorporated as a structural element a triple pun on 'minute'; in the temporal sense, as opposed to gargantuan and as 'my newt'. The work begins with the opening title *Gargantuan* with the same word spoken over it, followed by a close-up shot of an amphibian of indeterminate size. Over a slow pull-out which reveals the ever diminishing amphibian to be a small newt sitting on a bed, the filmmaker, who is gradually revealed as the shot widens, sings through a list of size adjectives from gargantuan to medium to tiny and finally to minute, at which point the end title *Minute* appears, symmetrically closing the piece as it began. This is followed by a sung coda: "I love my newt".

Unfortunately, shamefully, the film's symmetry and arguably some of its sense was destroyed in the broadcast because the programme editors started it after the opening title. Each one-minute work was introduced by a bombastic, metallic grey logo - ironically of a clock - and one can't help wondering whether the first three or four seconds of *Gargantuan* weren't sacrificed in order to accommodate this logo within the programme's allotted duration of 45'00".

The experience of watching this happen made one realise how vulnerable non-standard artists' film and videos are in the face of the might of the TV Institution, with its complex and obsessively rigid framework of schedules and timetables. This policy must in the end be self-defeating if it leads to the

exclusion of work which is unconventional within the context of standard TV programming.

Two recent events serve to strengthen this impression. First, a programme in the Channel Four *Rear Window* series called *Running Down the Mountain* was broadcast on the same night as *Gargantuan*. There the novelist and poet Ian Sinclair posed the question: why on earth cannot TV open up and relax, experiment, be daring? His answer: because they are terrified of 'wasting time'.

Secondly, regarding scheduling: a recent article in *The Guardian* by Georgina Henry (Monday 15th June) revealed that the new BBC soap *Eldorado* - on which twelve million pounds will be spent - is a strategic project primarily designed to 'prop up its evening schedule, left badly exposed by the waning popularity of *Wogan*'. One might naively have thought that as a public broadcasting service the BBC could, indeed should, afford to operate outside the

the BBC's share of the market slipped to 20% it would be 'impossible' to ask 80% of the viewing public to pay for the benefits enjoyed by only 20%. Hence the BBC is obliged to compete with ITV. (*Eldorado* is expected to raise the BBC's share of the market by 1.5% to between 34% and 36%).

All of this filters back into every last crevice of policy and programme making. How can one-minute videos and films fend for themselves in such a hostile setting and how can makers insure that their work is properly presented without cuts and disparaging remarks, as was the case last year and this? If not through contractual agreements then perhaps at least through the form of the work. This could mean making challenging work which is structured explicitly around the one minute brief and thus signals that integrity be respected.

Yet to do this is precisely to make one's work vulnerable to jeopardy through cutting, in the way the



Tony Hill 'A Short History of the Wheel'

stultifying constraints of the ratings war. Yet all the internal anxiety surrounding *Eldorado* is not over whether or not it will be good or bad TV, but about what ITV will compete against it with. What about the 'Coronation Street effect'? How will BBC 1 win back its audience after 8 pm? And so on. A reactively scheduling policy determined, ironically, not by what the Corporation would like to do but on what their rivals may or may not be going to do!

As Stuart Hood points out in his book *On Television* (1980), the ratings war matters politically, since if

John Smith example demonstrates, or in the case of a film by **William English** last year, whose palindromic structure was upset by shortening. Unjustly, weaker and more open-ended work suffers less from abbreviation.

Fortunately two outstanding films survived unscathed. In **Tony Hill's** delightful and subversive account of relativity *A Short History of the Wheel* we see a series of close-ups of wheels of vehicles moving through the ages, from ox cart to sports bicycle, with the crucial difference that the earth is seen to

revolve about the circumference of the wheel, instead of the wheel travelling along the ground.

William Raban's *Sundial*, a subtle and beautiful film of the Canary Wharf tower, was shown a week early, partly to trail the other nine one-minuters, but also, in view of its topicality, as part of an architectural story about Canary Wharf. In that context this complex and understated work showed itself to be vastly superior indeed to the usual standard of 'wall-paper' - as illustrative footage is derisively called in the industry - that is routinely provided by 'professional' camera crews. Such examples illustrate how much the BBC stands to gain by opening its mind and its schedules to artist film and video makers.

NICKY HAMLYN

Recent European Festivals

Meridiens/Semaine/Video Art Plastique/Medien Operative/Worldwide Video Festival

There is a film/video festival for just about every week of the year; you could, if so inclined, spend your time going from one to the next in a never ending circle; however, very few of us have the time, inclination or finances to become a festival groupie. The problem is deciding which festivals are relevant to submit work to and/or visit. These decisions tend to be based on quite different criteria but, without information gleaned from being there, the questions are difficult to answer.

Putting work into festivals costs money - tape copies, photographs (which the festival rarely returns), background publicity material and postage; thankfully nearly all but the really large commercial festivals have dropped the idea of entry fees. There is also rarely any financial return on this outlay, unless the festival has a competition and the work wins a prize or, in occasional instances, a screening fee is forthcoming, which is often only the case if they solicit your work. So, the answer to the question of submission is whether the festival is likely to be interested in the type of work, and how much is pre-selected. The following hopefully may provide some insights and information relevant to the above.

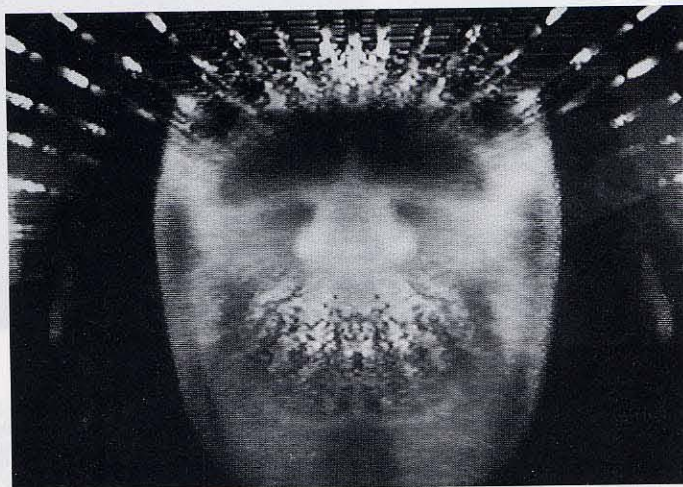
Meridiens (1er Festival de la Jeune Creation Video

Europeenne; 25 - 27 October 1991) was a first for Aubagne, and turned out to be a quite different animal to the one expected; it was not, as initially appeared, a festival for work by very young creators (i.e. within the 13-18 age bracket, such as the CO-OP festival in Birmingham) but was in fact for first videoprogrammes regardless of age, and owed more in its aspirations and presentation style to the models of Montreux and Cannes.

The overall context was European, and works were selected with the help of the relevant Alliance Francais offices, from Spain, Portugal, Italy, Holland, Switzerland and Scotland, as well as from within France.

The aim of providing a showcase situation for aspiring (professional) creators dominated all the festival events, and the organisers had ensured that a number of the actual makers, from the various different countries, were able to attend, along with various professionals from the French industry.

The festival comprised three separate and different screenings, the most important, which kicked off the Festival, being the well termed *Nuit du Videophage* - a viewing marathon comprising the official selection plus a few others which amounted to some 50 odd works ranging from 1 to 10 minutes; debates were held every afternoon which became the focal point of the festival (and these were televised live for transmission by the local FR3 station). In addition there were various music events and performances, and a gala prize giving which rounded off the event.



Cathy Vogan 'A Bed Full of Strangers'

A number of works shone through, mainly from the Italians and Portuguese; *Pax Max* by Alberto Callari (which won one of the prizes), *Um Sonho Pequeno* by Carlos Cabrita, *Simboli* by Raffaele Rago, and *Tapis Rouge et Cancans* by Stephan Moszcwicz. All of them used humour, but most importantly pushed the edges of visual language forward, and although they used spoken language, didn't rely upon it to

carry the work.

Le Semaine Internationale de Video (Geneva, 5 - 9 November 91) is by comparison, a well established event (being in its 4th year) and is wholly orientated towards video art - with a capital A. The festival is one that offers screening fees for work selected, and reasonable prizes for those entered into/selected for the competition. However, a large proportion of the festival screening time is devoted to retrospectives and invited curatorial selections.

Approximately 40 works were selected for the competition, each being screened about three times throughout; works selected for screening outside the competition numbered a further 60 individual works (which were screened once only); the overall selection from open submissions was therefore approximately 100 works.

This year, separate screening programmes were curated by Anne-Marie Duguet, Christine Van Assche, and Jean-Paul Fargier, plus retrospectives on the works of Bruce Nauman, Antonio Muntadas, and William Wegman; this made for a programme that was very much dominated by the Americans.

New works by Bill Viola (*The Passing*), Shelly Silver (*The Houses that are Left*) and Robert Cahen (*L'Isle Mysterieuse*) were premiered, as was *A Simple Case of Vision* by Irits Batsry, which was an emotional and visually challenging work, interpreting and transforming a Buckminster Fuller text (on the nature of vision and the notion of "normal" vision) into a parallel visual experience.

However, there was a lot of good work from Europe which held its own against the American tide. The very beautiful abstract work based on windmills and parts of the text from Don Quixote, *Coup de Vente* (by Jean-Francois Guiton) and *Bilocation* (Marina Grzanic, Aina Smid) a visually rich and revealing political work, although seen before and not part of the competition, stood out very strongly. Other works within the competition, which although not prize winners, were well received (and

would have got my vote) were; *A Bedfull of Strangers* (Cathy Vogan, France) a piece which presented an unusual and poetic use of electronic imagery which, rather than presenting an artificial construction of reality, concentrated on exploring emotional and psychological space; and Joao Moreira Salles' somewhat odd and intriguing documentary *Poetry Is One Or Two Lines* on a young

Brazilian poet who "left us too soon" and which, as a work, had a similar sensibility to the novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Video Art Plastique (Herouville Saint-Clair, 28 November-1 December 91) is also a well established festival which has a more relaxed approach than that of Geneva, being apparently less concerned with the American Art Market and more nationally orientated.

There were 30 or so works presented in the competition (to which entry was limited to 'young french videomakers' of less than 30 years old), plus a major retrospective of the work of Michel Jaffrennou, as well as a review of the very mesmeric, but disturbing, state of the art computer graphics and animation work by Cecile Babiole. A number of installation works were also presented for the first time as part of the festival, and one hopes that this will continue in the future.

This year, emphasis was put on work from the UK; curated by Jean-Jaques Gay under the title of London Calling, this featured a retrospective of the single screen works by David Hall, plus two separate programmes of works by a variety of UK artists, as well as inclusion of mainstream TV work, such as title sequences, idents, clips and music videos, plus ads by Roger Dean! - all of which went down extremely well with the primarily French audience.

Heure Exquise also presented an interesting European programme of artists work from their current catalogue, including *Stalingrad* by Jerome Coulet a brief but compulsive work based upon the theme of ghosts in the Parisian metro station of the same name; an amusing and rhythmic performance video by Volker Anding entitled *Baguette*, and Alexander Hahn's *DirtSite* which seems to get better every time I see it.

The Festival's Video a La Carte set up proved invaluable, and gave access to the Herouville video library collection of experimental work, as well as to all the works being screened within the Festival.

Medien Operative VideoFest (Berlin, 13 - 24 February 92) was, by comparison a little disappointing, as it seemed somehow to lack spirit; the American influence was very evident, with a series of screenings covering the history of American Video Art presented every afternoon throughout the festi-

val; and although a lot of works were shown within the competition, most of them had been round the circuit a few times, there being very little new work in evidence.

On the other hand, there were a number of installations, both at the main festival site and at various other connected galleries, some of which were specially commissioned and some brought in and re-staged. A new installation was staged (from work in



Videoteque at the Worldwide Video Festival

progress) by Joan Jonas, and Fabrizio Plessi's installation, at a warehouse gallery in the east of the city, was a visually simple but stunning reflection on political control.

The World Wide Video Festival (Den Haag, 7 - 12 April 92) is probably one of the best European video festivals; in its tenth year, it is always exceptionally well organised - the technical quality for presentation of the work is of paramount importance to the organisers and this really shows and makes the viewing experience very pleasurable.

The Festival has a particularly strong international flavour, but is not overly dominated by one particular sector, however it is very much an artists' festival, although representatives from the various different areas within the video arts sector are usually present in force. The event can always be relied upon to present a variety of 'types' of work, as well as a large number of new works, from both younger artists as well as the more established names. The selection of work strongly reflects the curatorial policy of the festival director, Tom Van Vleet, and usually throws up a few interesting surprises.

A great emphasis is placed on information dissemination and exchange, for which the focal point is the Kijkhuis itself; with the main screening theatre upstairs, and reception and bar downstairs, this the main place where everybody spends a lot of time,

meeting people between screenings etc. A daily broadsheet is also published by the festival, providing information on the events, schedule changes, news, as well as interviews with the artists about their work; public interviews with the artists are also conducted following many of the screenings. Additionally, the festival has a two day market for distributors which is very valuable and commands high attendance figures. It also stages a number of special events and screening which differ from year to year; this year there was an adventurous alliance with the Beckett festival, and a day specifically dedicated to student work and discussions between colleges from all over Holland.

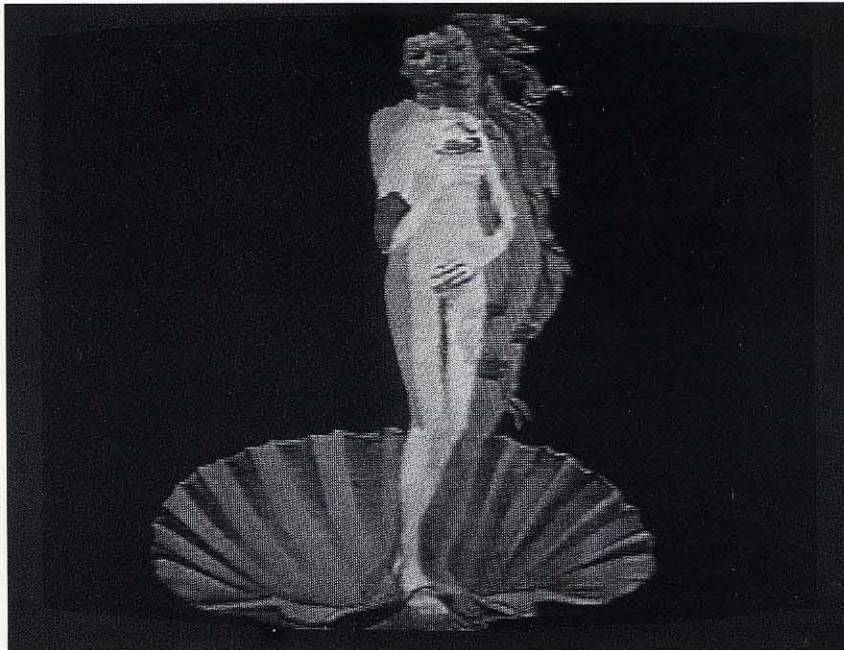
Although there were some 80-100 single screen works shown within the festival, plus a large, well organised and equipped video request viewing area, installations are an equally important part of the event; this year the festival was more ambitious than ever with regard to scale, complexity, and sheer number of installations. Also, this time around, the competition was held within the installa-

tion (rather than tape) section.

There were twelve installations in total at various sites throughout the city centre - all within easy walking distance of the Kijkhuis, and as it was warm and sunny, this was also a very pleasant experience.

One of the most dynamic installations was *West Wind Welt* by Ingo Gunther, reflecting the changed political situation of the world represented by two flags, tightly flapping in the airflow of two giant fans, with images projected onto them, but distorted by the winds of history. The other installation which I really enjoyed was George Snow's manic piece entitled *Motorway*. This was video art at its most exuberant and fun, a hallucinatory pinnacle of achievement combining bizarre landscape, classical architecture, speed, low flying alien aircraft and articulated lorries - who needs Eurodisney!

JANE RIGBY



Ulrike Rosenbach 'Reflections on the Birth of Venus'

VIDEO ART 1976-1990 - THE GERMAN CONTRIBUTION

Goethe Institute, Glasgow,
May/June 1992

On three consecutive evenings in May, the Goethe Institute in Glasgow presented a package of video work called *Video Art 1976-1990 - The German Contribution*. The term video art seems to imply that the qualities of this medium are used to further develop a thought or a feeling, an idea which is then conveyed to the viewer. The search for a philosophical approach and personal aesthetic are expected here as they are in other areas of the visual arts. Video art situates itself apart from TV. Its presentation lies in a no-man's land between the museum/art institution and television. With the exception of one tape - **Hanno Baethe's** *Longing for Sodom*, a document of the actor Kurt Raab and his imminent death from AIDS - all the works in this package sit comfortably under the heading of 'video art'.

As with all national surveys, there will always be glaring omissions depending upon the viewer's perspective. There is certainly no suggestion here of a definitive representation past and present, no claims at embracing all concepts, movements or innovations; and reassessments such as these (at least) give rise to thoughts on the development and position of video art and its aesthetic.

The accompanying catalogue presents the video makers and their works with a description, quote or personalised text, photograph/s and biography. It is the biographies which make the most interesting reading. The number of awards, scholarships and

exhibitions, along with the breadth of their education in different parts of the world under a variety of influential artists and professors is impressive. Germany's strong economic position and its cultural implications are evident here. The introduction to the catalogue by Dr. Helmut Friedel in part covers that well-trodden ground of 'video as an electronic medium' discourse, with the inevitable quote from Baudrillard on video technologies' relationship to the mass media. However, it fails to enhance our understanding of the video image as a visual aesthetic and fails to place the video images within the historical context they require for an adequate appreciation. Along with the theory, some factual information would have been interesting also. For example, the influence of Fluxus in the '60s and '70s: 1959, the assault on TV is manifest - Wolf Vostell erases a television programme leaving the viewer looking at a blank screen. Four years later he buries a TV set; 1963, Nam June Paik interferes with a number of video monitors through the use of electro magnetics; 1965, the portapak arrives on the market; 1968, the work of Wim T. Schippers (television artist) has robbed the medium of its mask of reliability, predictability and everydayness and plays havoc with the unwritten laws and codes of TV (for example, for the magazine programme *Hoelpla*, the army was represented in a series of interviews with drunken soldiers; the first on-screen bare breasts emerged from behind a Christian newspaper and a female yodeler was depicted against a background of an enlarged postcard of Austrian mountain scenery. Later in 74/75 in a similar magazine programme the then world famous singer Donna Summer was ridiculed when the presenter loudly expressed his revulsion towards her music and stopped the record amid the sound of ear-splitting scratching - leaving the star mouthing on screen in an embarrassing way). The advent of the synthe-

siser and other computer equipment from the end of the sixties creates the ability to generate forms and figures without resorting to any observation or recording at all, and the possibility of images to react to sound and change their shape through sound impulses. In the '70s as the technical possibilities of the medium grow, the conceptual art ideas gradually lose their impact and the manipulation of time, space and image take precedence. Present day video art now seems far removed from that early period.

The earliest work here is **Ulrike Rosenbach's** *Reflections On the Birth of Venus* from 1976, a work which is as pertinent today as when it was made. The simplicity of this work is its strength. The artist places herself within the projected image of Boticelli's work of the same name. She has arisen from the shell as Venus has, her hands positioned on her breast and pubic hair, which she alters as she turns. The white half of her costume (the front), delineates her presence and form within the painting, her black half (the back) merges her into Venus' image, and so it continues. The piece is meditative and Bob Dylan's soundtrack, *Sad-eyed Lady of the Lowlands*, echoes the mood perfectly. The work is simple, subtle, sensitive and hypnotic.

Klaus Vom Bruch is one of the first generation audio-visual practitioners who hasn't come to the medium through another arts discipline. His work deals with the sinister implications of the body and technology. He produces picture sequences counter to the customary rhythm of television. In *The Duracell Tape* (1980) 4 ready-made images are used. The battery and the drumming bunnies from the Duracell adverts, a bomber pilot over Nagasaki in 1945, and an ad depicting a woman's face partly obliterated by her hand. The rhythm of editing is the driving force and commentary within this 10 minute tape. A momentum is gradually built up, the edits get tighter, on each viewing of the ad (with the woman's face) the camera has moved in closer until the lens appears to be squashed into the palm of her hand. The aerial perspective of Nagasaki in 1945 serves only in its relation to the bomber pilot whose hand signal functions as a rhythmic device within this repetitious ascent. Finally, it is the burnt faces and bodies of Vietnamese war victims which break the rhythm, halt the momentum and jolt us out of this mindless technological fast lane, to consider its consequences.

In *Azimuth* (1985), Bruch superimposes a satellite dish initially over man's face, then over a man's torso, his diaphragm moving in and out with his breathing. The spinning satellite dish and the sound it creates as it 'scoops' the air determine the pace. There are no aggressive video edits, techniques, colours, but a regularity, a deliberateness, a calmness. Footage of Fidel Castro interrupts the continu-

ity but the process returns. Bruch's concept is strong, his editing precise, his use of sound giving equal consideration to the pictures which resonate and know their limitations and potential.

Despite the fact that the above mentioned works from Bruch and Rosenbach are many years old and having been shown many times before, they remain a pleasure to watch and engage with. For newcomers to the medium they are worth viewing.

One of the videos which deals with a narrative structure is **Jean Francois Guiton's** *Coup De Vent* (1990). The title is a play on words and it is an inventive form of story-telling, an interpretation of a scene from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Retaining all the adventure and spirit of a swashbuckling episode - horses, musketeers, lances and hearty laughter - Guiton has stripped the narrative down to its bare essentials, like a child who only has a few mundane objects to hand but with his imagination enacts out the whole battle. Our imagination is fuelled by the relationship of sound to image. Images flash up on the screen with a sound that describes their action. A windmill's sail swoops down over the screen, two hands are seen pulling on gloves, a wooden club/truncheon is brandished in defence and attack, a body writhes in its pretence of physical combat. The visual pictures are 'modern' and menacing, the sound causes a disjunction by placing us in a time of noble deeds and quixotic adventure.

Other works in this package include the punk-influenced *Fragment Video* by **Notorsche Reflex**, the amusing and satiric *TV Trilogy* by **Volker Andung**, the filmic work of **Annebarbe Kau**, and the very dubious *Body Horizons* by **Wolf Kahlen**. Kahlen's concept is the 'discovery and understanding of the body. Of course he doesn't use his own body for this process or another man's body, but two female bodies, one white and Jewish, one black and from the Bronx. Within the first five minutes of this twenty five minute tape, the artist's intentions were highly questionable. The women talked freely about their backgrounds and feelings towards their bodies in what was sadly another classic case of female collusion in the great male concept. One of the women casually remarked that her mother wondered why a German artist had travelled all this way to film two naked women. A poignant question which was of course not answered. When the credits appeared at the end of the tape, much to our surprise we discovered the artist had been on a DAAD Scholarship to New York. The two women were instructed to mark with paint the areas on their bodies they could not see with the human eye. One wondered why the obvious and simple object, the mirror wasn't used or why the women didn't twist and turn to achieve their aim rather than standing in a restricted upright position. As they carried out their activity, we could hear off-frame, Kahlen's (or the cameraman's) remarks,

"...mmm..yeh..that's good", as he focussed his lens. The whole exercise seemed so facile it could only have served to satisfy Kahlen's own voyeuristic tendencies. Other videos included are by **Nam June Paik, Marcel Odenbach, Ingo Guenther, Maria Vedder, Bettina Gruber**. This is an important body of quality work from Germany. Outside of the three organised screenings it was possible to phone and arrange further viewing time at the Goethe Institute. A monitor was set up, coffee was available and the visitor could pick, choose and view at leisure. The advantage in watching video in this manner is considerable, and in a relaxed atmosphere, with potential for secondary viewing, there is automatically more psychological space and greater receptivity to ideas, structure and aesthetic.

The need for more screenings and ad-hoc videotapes along with some kind of organised discussions cannot be stressed strongly enough. Creating in a vacuum is a slow and uninspiring process.

LOUISE CRAWFORD

The Sheffield Media Show 1992:

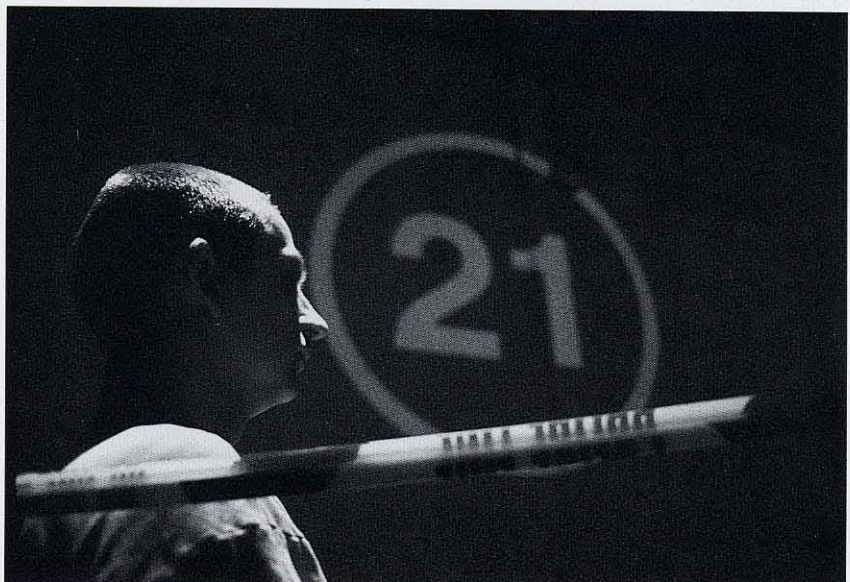
A report, some reviews.

The **Sheffield Media Show** strives to be a festival which represents the work of students and new young artists. It includes video, film, photography, installation and site-specific work. Performance is central to its programme. Over 400 applications were submitted, 160 of which were installation proposals and this perhaps highlights the number of artists committed to developing new work against poor financial rewards and limited opportunities. There were 25 performances and 26 installations, 6 talks and a European screening programme made up from 42 tapes.

The festival is a platform geared towards bridging the gap in the current award structures which can make students exempt and graduates inexperienced. The Media Show aims to assist with the transition between graduate and practicing artist. The audience was largely made up from visiting colleges, 13 in total, and for this reason the festival remains student based. However, programming work in the evening at Sheffield Independent Film provided a wider audience than that which was present for the performances at the Psalter Lane site (at the Poly). With the majority of performances gaining a capacity audience there is clearly a place for an event of this nature.

Off-site were **Blast Theory** and this young company are perhaps what their name suggests and for this they are to be admired. *Gunmen Kill Three* pays lip service to the notion of issue. It examines the role of killing in our culture, what it says about this most pertinent of explorations into the human condition, remains descriptive. The actions in the piece break through the audience, we are constantly shuffled in the performance area as each component is highlighted and the scenario brought to bare, making the supposition of violence something the audience can participate in, expounding a feeling of reality: for a moment you are witness to some crisis, or breakdown. Unapologetically voyeuristic, this strategy pays off, it's forever a snap shot, a precise moment you can feel, offering an audience member the option of shooting with an air gun the moving targets of two performers draws euphoria and pleasure. Perhaps this piece did go beyond description and make you feel the power and the sexuality of killing, but it was so long that these moments were wasted. The images which were left in my head were of arbitrary visual renditions of murder, the site of a woman being dragged across the space covered in maggots or the washing of a limp male body.

Arguably the group dynamic constantly displaces the



Blast Theory 'Gun Men Kill Three'

individual identity, the individual's role, Belfast born **Andre Stitt** offered *Romper Room*, a piece which explored the violence which an individual can achieve. 'Rompering' is the humiliating debauchery which involves the torture and possible murder of innocent victims. The audience were made witness to a series of aggressive actions, of transformation, and metaphor which all too easily became about violence against women, and it was unclear as to what was the role of displaying the simulated rape of an inflatable doll. Such an action only succeed in persuading the audience that this piece was not about a political situation as it had been previously pitched in the publicity, but more a vehicle for Stitt's ability to render an audience powerless. Everything was on Stitt's terms and this left little room for dialogue or shrewd political comment.

Although the majority of work is developmental in its approach, this was offset in 1992 by the presence of work by **Tony White, Chris Morris, Clock Live Art, Kirsten Reynolds**, and other non students. The energy of Chris Morris' *Kickin* was a group piece using the choreography of football to simulate a floorshow of expertise. Inventive in its approach to what could be the most male of sports, Morris through the use of dance played down any idea that this work concerned masculinity. It consisted of tightly weaved 7 minutes of actions including standing to be photographed, protecting the crotch before the fictional penalty is taken, ham slow motion with a football secured to the foot of each of the five performers and a lot of high kicking. An excellent deflection of any calling for a theoretical response.

Yorkshire and Humberside Arts enabled the Media Show to allocate a larger proportion of its funds towards Blast Theory and Andre Stitt, which meant that there were two large scale professional performances which would raise awareness of the event for both a new and a traditional audience for the Media Show. Using a sliding scale of support for non students was the only way the Media Show could support new work other than that which is being produced by students. It's a difficult situation, only offering travel to some artists and fees to others, but it's the only way an ambitious event of this scale can be made possible and opportunities offered. The idea of including work other than by students is currently under review, as maintaining its current format means the employment of an experienced co-ordinator.

The Division of Fine Art at Sheffield City Polytechnic's School of Cultural Studies met the other running costs. A total budget of just over £4000 existed. This relationship with the Polytechnic makes it difficult to authenticate its position as a national festival and thus receive more realistic funding, and yet without its link to the college - or more accurately, the administrative and organisa-

tional support from the student body- the event could not be realised.

In 1992 a radical selection policy was implemented and this contributed to a high level of very good work. The curatorial approach which emerged centred around the promotion of issue based work, including themes of sexuality, nationality, or the assemblage of other contemporary discourse around representation, or just accepting work which was attempting to be experimental in its form. Indicative of this policy was the number of works dealing with Northern Ireland, identity, Gay sexuality, Aids/HIV and surveillance which were present.

The absence of the National Review of Live Art has meant a very noticeable collapse of support for new practitioners working in Live Art. With the temporary loss of a festival of this nature we anticipated the Media Show acting as a stop gap. The Media Show however, showed a reluctance to support live work from a drama base, in part because it was unable to facilitate such work: but it was also felt that reproducing the NRLA's contribution to that sector would not be a positive move for the festival when it had to cut its own place on the national calendar. In doing this we also aimed to facilitate proposals which would require a lot of preparation and pre-planning on our behalf, providing an informed and sympathetic response. We made not having a licensed space or a black box theatre and lighting rig an advantage, but this is not something gained through choice. How the work was selected was therefore a fusion of criterions from equal opportunities to what was possible given the budget we possessed.

ALAN MACLEAN
(Organiser of the Sheffield Media Show).

New Visions

International Film and Video Festival, Glasgow

From April 1st - 9th, a host of international, national and local festival organisers, curators and film/video makers gathered in Glasgow for the **New Visions** International Festival of Film & Video. The festival was organised by **EVENTSPACE** - a group of individuals who for the past five years have been intermittently profiling time-based arts in Scotland: organising screenings of film and video, installations, performances and site-located projects around Glasgow. **EVENTSPACE** aim to promote and initiate innovative art projects locally. The festival is **Eventspace's** largest project to date and its success a result of past experience, knowledge and a growing reputation within this area.

The main venue of the festival was Cinema 2 in the Glasgow Film Theatre in the centre of town. This

recently built small cinema (an addition to their already existing premises) is comfortable, warm, a manageable size for introductions, questions/answers and the film and video projection of a fairly high standard. The cinema is also conveniently situated next to its recently opened licensed bar.

The Festival Launch was held in Transmission Gallery, where the Hungarian filmmaker **Gabor Csaszari** projected his 'slit-shutter' film *LSD*, (Lake Shore Drive). Two 35mm films (with no frame lines) - simultaneously running through a purpose built projector shelved on a pair of ladders and secured by G-clamps - challenged our notions of the presentation of film, film language, central perspective and the area between photography and film.

For the remainder of the festival Transmission became the **New Visions Videoteque**: five booths and four shelves of tapes to select from. This facility was well used, demonstrating the value of viewing in one's own time and being able to familiarise oneself with the ideas, aesthetics and technological devices employed. It is unfortunate that this type of resource is not made available more often, as it provides a valuable contribution to the understanding of both film and video.

At the Art School in the lecture theatres were talks by **Sean Cubitt, Kathy Rogers** and **Gabor Csaszari**. Sean Cubitt's, 'Electronic Ecologies; Alternatives to An Administered Society' was a stimulating critique of the electronic age run by corporate giants with a transnational capital flow, and an exploitative attitude towards the Third World. An awareness of the politics involved in our rapidly developing electronic media and electronic cultures provided a critical edge to our otherwise innocent viewing of video technology. Kathy Rogers' presentation on Virtual Reality was refreshingly informative, intelligible and discerning, particularly considering the amount of techno-jargon surrounding this field. She discussed the nature of VR's interaction with the arts, its wider cultural implications, as well as its aggressive military applications; together with the characteristic male domination VR has a tendency to perpetuate. She also touched upon the health and safety aspects of this new technology.

Informed talks such as these should not be relegated to the aftermath of screenings, but interspersed between programmes. They introduce a skillful discourse and a broader political outlook, which goes some way towards challenging the 'festival trap' of film and video consumerism.

The Goethe Institute hosted two of the nine International Zeitgeist programmes. Both these screenings were free and well attended, reaffirming the Goethe Institute's role as an important and alter-

native screening venue. The Apollo Bar acted as the Festival Club for socialising and gathering information on the day's screenings and events. With reasonably priced food and a pleasant atmosphere this was an ideal venue for sitting, talking and exchanging information and addresses.

Over six afternoons and evenings a considerable amount of work was screened. Many of the programmes were too long and too many challenging programmes were scheduled back to back with little light relief. It was good to see Central Europe so well represented. Works from Slovenia, Hungary, Romania and Poland gave a suggestion of current picture-making activities in those countries. This was backed up by the attendance of individual filmmakers and curators, who also took a lively interest in the general programme. It was inspiring to witness such enthusiasm. There is an element to all festivals - and New Visions was no exception - of being the curator's latest port of call: of appearing for their own programmes, exchanging greetings with other curatorial travellers, and then moving on to the next festival (in this case, for some, it was the Worldwide Video Festival). Whilst this is in the nature of the 'circuit', too many festivals exist solely for this purpose.

By contrast the members of **Despite TV** (the London based video co-operative) were some of the

more active participants of the festival. The Communities of Resistance programmes (of which they were a part) dealt with class, political, racial and cultural struggles around the world. Despite TV's activities and co-operative structure - with production and post-production facilities on offer, together with a training programme for members and a video magazine - seeks to represent the ever growing amount of silenced/oppressed voices and issues: providing a different story and image to the one we are accustomed to seeing on television.

Both of the Punk programmes were a delight, especially the second, with the legendary *'Shellshock Rock'*: a great document of the Belfast punk scene of over a decade ago and a fantastic piece of filming, with all the essential ingredients: good music, urban landscapes, street credibility and a spotty youth culture. Taken together with, *'Der Wunderbare Mandarin'*, **Peter Braatz's** B/W atmospheric journey into '80s punk aesthetics; and *'Love, Jealousy and Revenge'*, the witty sexual romp from **Michael Bryntrup**: this programme was informative, challenging and enjoyable.

New Visions' own compilations, selected on an open submission basis - termed 'International Zeitgeist' - were extremely impressive; with a fair representation of women's work, a proficient use of high and

low technologies and a diversity of subject matter. It made one further question why we are exposed to vast amounts of commercial American pulp in the name of entertainment, when so many viable alternatives exist.

This overview has many omissions, several programmes and events have not been mentioned and the ones that have been, in no great depth. But hopefully the festival has acted as some sort of catalyst for further productions, screenings, discussions; undoubtedly adding a necessary impetus to a Scottish film and video culture constantly held bubbling under the surface.

It was unfortunate that a day or evening of Scottish work was not programmed. Local makers need to learn to prioritise themselves more instead of continually relegating themselves to the lower ranks and back seats of international platforms. Current activity in moving-image making in Scotland needs to be assessed in order to develop a progressive understanding of its aesthetics and its politics within our cultural context. Meanwhile discussions will commence around the development of a New Visions 2.

LOUISE CRAWFORD



Fayd Jungnickel 'An Ill Wind Blows

R E V I E W

LONDON MUSICIANS' COLLECTIVE

First Annual Festival of Experimental Music

Conway Hall, London
Wednesday 20th May - Sunday
24th May 1992

Five nights and 21 acts; videos, workshops and discussions; paintings (**Gina Southgate**) and publications; even an 'Off-stage' invitation to all and sundry to come play with the international celebrities. Yes, the schedule was punishing - scarcely a semibreve between each intense 40 minutes set - but generally a punishment of luxury!

If events inside the Conway Hall were intended to reflect the current state of 'experimental music' at large, then improvisation - particularly the non-ideological, free improvisation - appears to have reached virtually hegemonic proportions. Somewhat ironic, when you consider that a number of notable improvisors have made it clear that they don't regard what they do as being 'experimental', since that term throws up connotations of testing-grounds and preparatory exercises: the things people do *anterior to the real thing*. Anyway, doubtless the London Musicians' Collective (LMC) agonized over the naming of its festival in the light of these theoretical debates. The matter rests here.

Louis Moholo + Gary Curzon + John Law opened the proceedings very much in line with the free jazz tradition. Curzon's saxophone still pines for the melodic, though occasionally makes spirited forays into more abstract territory. Moholo was at ease wherever the music went and Law's piano supplied some elegant touches to a competent set. The classical was much in evidence with the arrival of **Media**



Euan Parker/Sainkho Namtchylak

Photo © Z. V. Vasovic

Luz, a string trio (2 violins and harp) plus **Phil Minton**, whose vocal 'orchestra' of tragi-comic eruptions is much-loved on the international improvising scene. The rub occurred in the engaging juxtaposition of his elastic virtuosity and their restrained, partly-scored chamber temperament.

Americans **Ben Neill** and **Nicolas Collins** are up to their eyebrows in electronics. Spaghetti everywhere. The first piece reduced the vitality of Haydn to a barrage of pseudo-orchestral FX, emanating mainly from Collins' bulky, electronicised trombone. Neill's 'mutant trumpet' playing just about kept David Wright's text piece afloat, but the words were lost in a hail of over-amplified distortion. **Jeffrey Morgan + Klaus Wilmanns + Paul Hession** rounded off the evening with a storming set of straight-down-the-line free improv: the musical equivalent of what the sumo wrestler calls *oshi dashi* - victory by force-out. Morgan's squealing sax was a remarkably controlled and expressive voice, Wilmanns' bass quietly foreboding, whilst Hession's resourcefulness and speed across the skins was captivating.

Thursday was special. A packed house was enthralled by Siberian-born singer, **Sainkho Namtchylak**, whose extraordinarily theatrical, yet ultimately indescribable, Buddhist-influenced 'throat singing' provided the focus for much of the evening. Later she teamed up with **Evan Parker** after he'd delivered another of his lengthy and now legendary, hermetic soprano solos. In their duets there was the exciting and unmistakable sense that new ground was being traversed.

Somehow, **Alan Tomlinson** managed to follow this. Arguably the most radical performer at the festival, his highly visual trombone improvisations challenged accepted notions of directional, virtuosity and audience expectation (many of us just laughed

at his bewildering range of extended techniques; some of us wondered whether this was the 'right' response). Cage said: "*Let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories, or the expressions of human sentiments*". Perhaps this was the way to approach Tomlinson's magnificent work.

By now even the hardiest of us were feeling the effects of mental fatigue and cerebral overload. This was probably the primary reason why the imaginative grouping of **Sylvia Hallett, Tim Hodgkinson, Ken Hyder** and **Sainkho** (again!) whose leisurely set, divided into duets, trios and quartet, never really took off.

Nick Couldry set Friday evening in motion, performing a sort of open-heart surgery on the piano, reminding us that the inside of the instrument is as fertile a region for exploration as the outside. Strings were rubbed, massaged, plucked and beaten with a variety of identified and unidentified objects. His article on improvisation, on sale at the bookstall, was also well worth investigating.

The five-piece, **Garden of Noise**, largely lived up to their name, but were sensitive enough to combine their ferocious free blowing and lyrical collisions with **Geoff Hawkins'** lyrical flute and some satirical thematic material reminiscent of the Mothers of Invention. **Pat Thomas'** use of electronics was exemplary for a number of reasons, including his restraint, his unpredictability (using the same sample more than once is a rarity these days), and the fact that he doesn't drown out non-electronic instruments (this 'problem' needs to be addressed!). After the Garden's intensity **David Watson's** solo electric guitar got somewhat lost in the rush for liquid refreshment. Those who stayed *and* listened enjoyed what they heard, though the case for longer breaks between acts had been clearly stated.

Catherine Jauniaux and **Ikue Mori** have worked



Clive Bell, Mark Sanders, Steve Beresford

Photo © Z. V. Vasovic

with the likes of John Zorn, David Moss and Fred Frith. Consequently, their set was not only eclectic, but executed with considerable wit and agility. Jauniaux's voice, the expressive focus of their songs, scaled the histrionic as well as the hysterical. Mori's electronics were more fragmented: sporadic drum machine, tintinnabulary flurries, Oriental rattles, interspersed with rainstorm clusters. They were followed by **Orchestre Murphy** who looked decidedly out of context amidst all this intense improvisation. They did, however, generate the only instance of spontaneous audience dancing!

Saturday evening, the penultimate, was the closest we came to a mixed-media celebration. Mixed results were, of course, the predictable outcome, though the decision to showcase improvised music interacting with other experimental media (video and dance) was laudable.

David Sawyer played a number of short improvisations featuring his self-built extended xylophones in dialogue with **Lou Gare's** mellifluous saxophone. Sawyer tapped out shifting, repetitive, rhythmic patterns over which Gare effortlessly meandered.

Experimental music at its most hypnotic, non-confrontational and accessible. Which, was quite the contrary to **Die! Trip Computer, Die!** whose video and electronics collaboration turned out not to be as much fun as the programme notes suggested. The two TV screens displayed assorted teacups, a swastika and something falling down some steps - over and over. Aurally they were another case of drowning by new technology: sampled voice-fragments, grindingly familiar percussive material.

ARC + No Mean Feat brought together the abstract and physical elements of free improvisation. Despite limited space the dancers, **Jo Blowers** and **Simon Whitehead** (No Mean Feat), performed exceptionally well. To say they merely enacted the string projections of **Sylvia Hallett**, **Danny Kingshill** and **Gus Garside** might sound a touch simple minded, but there was obviously something highly sensitive and symbiotic happening up there. Clearly one of the festival highlights.

The brothers **Blegvad**, **Peter** and **Kristoffer**, brought the evening to a close with a polished and entertaining selection of idiosyncratic songs. Whilst

the music was not discernibly experimental, Peter's lyrics were interestingly bizarre. Obsessional love and casual mutilation were among the subjects covered. *A Model of Kindness*' his eulogy to someone unnamed and elderly, was really rather touching.

Ghosts Before Breakfast take their name from a dada short by Hans Richter. Unfortunately, their use of video material (TV ads) recaptured none of that director's flair and humour. Their sax, double bass and drums free improv, however, was densely textured and required no visual accompaniment or the taped 'Land of Hope and Glory' finale. Even more challenging was the **Clive Bell**, **Steve Beresford** and **Mark Sanders** line-up. Beresford is one of the most uncompromising players around and enough to scare the shit out of any timid improviser. His movement from one electronic idea to the next is virtually hyperactive. Bell allowed him to force the pace and responded with some exquisite colours on various bamboo flutes and what looked like a Japanese sho. Sanders produced some delicate cymbalwork, but was generally sonically sandwiched. The sort of music that sinks in a week or so later.

Vanessa Mackness and **Barry Guy** performed a few of the most enchanting improvised duets it has been my pleasure to hear for some while. At times her voice possessed an almost folk-like quality which Guy enhanced with subtle shadings. A more sensitive and inventive double bass player, you will have a job to find. Fittingly, the festival was concluded by **Derek Bailey** and **John Stevens**, two of Europe's most experienced and respected improvisors. Stevens quickly established the seemingly limitless possibilities a master can derive from even a considerably reduced drum set; likewise, Bailey further demonstrated why his articulacy as a guitarist in this context is unsurpassed.

The LMC is an ambitious organisation. Only an ambitious organisation could have conceived of and then efficiently delivered a marvellous festival of this duration and complexity in an area as seemingly 'uncommercial' as experimental music. Moreover, in order to realise its future ambitions, the LMC has begun to address that thorny issue, commercial sponsorship, knowing that state subsidy alone is no longer sufficient to make big things happen. Attracting business to experimental music is likely to be its most important non-musical challenge in the '90s. And since this is virgin territory - in the UK, at least - it will require the full range of its improvisatory skills. This, the First Annual Festival of Experimental Music, demonstrated beyond doubt that it was possible to attract sponsorship without compromising the music itself. The only thing *packaged* was the bitter I bought at the bar.

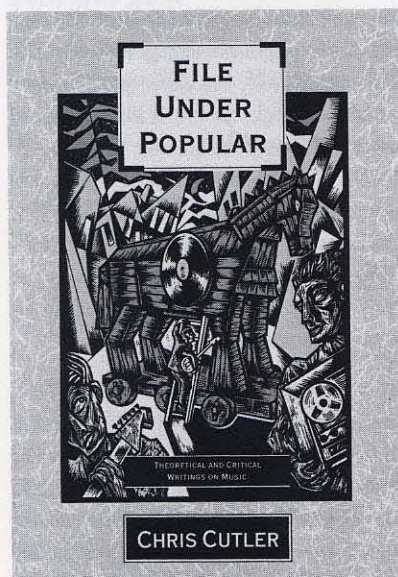
CHRIS BLACKFORD

R E V I E W S

File Under Popular: Theoretical and critical writings on music (2nd Edition)

Chris Cutler, ReR Megacorp & Semiotext(e)/ Autonomedia.
200pp, 16pp photographs.
Index. Paperback £8.95.

ISBN 0-946423-04-0



Chris Cutler's book *File Under Popular* was first published in 1985. It consisted of several articles and lectures which Cutler had prepared for various occasions over the previous seven or eight years, during which time he had been drumming with various groups (such as Henry Cow, the Art Bears, Cassiber and others), participating in the Rock in Opposition support organisation for like-minded groups in European countries, and organising the Recommended Records record label and distribution.

Despite the diverse sources of the articles comprising *File Under Popular*, their origin in Cutler's own active involvement imparted an imperative power lacking in much pop sociology. On first publication, the book's deserved impact was diminished by an unfortunate decision to publish the text in typescript rather than typeset form. The new second edition is more readable, due to it having been typeset - in itself an indicator of the changes in available technology. In content, some chapters are little changed, while others, particularly the chapter on The Residents, are rewritten. Some fragmentary aspects of the original edition of *File Under Popular* might have been expected to have been either developed or discarded, such as the annotated discography appended to the chapter on *Progressive Music in the UK*, which offers 30 word commentaries on around 50 records - not uninteresting notes (originating in the Recommended Records catalogue) but inappropriately placed.

If *File Under Popular* aspires to intervention, it is one formed from the residues of past frustrations. The "counter-culture" of the late sixties failed to sustain a common forum for radical politics and radical cultural activity, or even to recognise that the two went hand-in-hand. Although positioned towards the end of the book, the chapter on 'Progressive' Music, 'Progressive' Politics? is a key text in this respect. Here Cutler criticises a once-common attitude on the Left (although the perpetrators go unnamed) which preferred folk music or songs with 'correct sentiments' to 'progressive' music (whose form and content are chosen and developed by the participants). *File Under Popular* is a substantial riposte to such ideas. However, since the late sixties, not only was the opportunity for 'progressive' music squandered within the communities which might have fostered it, but the Left itself decomposed, particularly over the seven years since the first edition, with consequent difficulties for an attempt to anchor an argument about progressive music in socialism as it was. Music, whether folk groups in bars or the pop music studied by the cultural studies appatchiks, functions mainly as a nostalgic binding agent.

The basic argument is that the morass of 'popular' music conceals the potential of collectively-created music which uses existing and new instrumental and recording technology in new and challenging ways. Progress would then result from musicians' struggles with form and material. Such a project is influenced by an encounter with improvisation, but differs in its emphasis on recording and documenting. Defending the musicians' area of autonomy also implies supporting and enlarging their communications with others - hence projects like Rock in Opposition and its offshoots. Consequently, the book tries to shield initiatives such as musician-run record labels from the critique of the commodity - instead regarding them as 'mass-products' (the difference being that which Marxism tried to maintain between exchange-

value and use-value).

The central part of *File Under Popular* contains chapters on the music of Sun Ra, The Residents, Phil Ochs and the development of British Progressive Music - all peripheral to the mainstream of popular music. Here is an exercise of 'taste' (forming identity through choosing one subset of recorded commodities) no different from that of the folk club or the seminar room. Against that is the feeling that the durability, incommensurability and continued challenge of one's choice leaves an important residue.

The chapter on Sun Ra expands on the possibilities of musicians' self-managed projects. By issuing countless records on his own Saturn label since the mid-50's, Sun Ra has established a unique level of documentation of the Arkestra without the overt mediation of the music industry. However, despite the crude presentation of many of these records, can they really be regarded as stepping outside the music business? One extreme of self-activity lies in vanity publishing, where most of the distribution can be expected to fall outside commerce (as gifts), but which, nonetheless, simulates the 'normal' market product. The intentions behind the pressing of Sun Ra's man records over the years, stylistically varied from R&B and harmony singing through to the many recordings of later live concerts, relate to perception of their potential outreach. The hand-scrawled sleeve on an LP issued on a small budget inhabits the shadow work of the industry norms rather than escaping the commodity.

The work of The Residents presented a similar problem: inserts with their early records apparently encouraging two-way contact (or even networking) but through the medium of contact with their self-construction as a business, the Cryptic Corporation. The revision of the chapter on The Residents is not unexpected. Cutler rightly emphasised their novel position as non-musicians creating music and controlling the dissemination of their own image, but the proximity of his involvement with them resulted in an uneasy chapter in the original book. The rewritten chapter is less circumspect and thus more informative about their activity, in particular the recording method adopted for *Satisfaction* and *Third Reich and Roll*.

The question of lineage underpins parts of the chapter on Sun Ra, in presenting him as the 'least acknowledged' influence on rock musicians' use of electronic keyboards. That outlook re-emerges in the chapter on *Progressive Music in the UK*. To maintain a thread of underground progressive music requires that other threads must be shorn away. For example, that the British musical underground appears as the only begetter of the Pink Floyd - contrasted sharply with the effete Californian underground - is a retrofit which omits cross-currents such as in the development of *Interstellar Overdrive*. As with the reception of Sun Ra in Europe, a creative

misunderstanding of what the American groups were doing allowed an indigenous music to develop. *File Under Popular* delineates the Progressive Music of the late sixties from the Pop of the time (thus erasing, for example, any resemblance between The Pink Floyd and Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich) and from bandwagon-jumping. Thus, Cutler presents bands such as Family as reactionary (suspiciously like anti-provincial prejudice) while nodding in the direction of bands like Egg. What criteria (other than relative commercial success/failure and personal affinity) placed Egg on the good side and Gentle Giant on the bad side? This points to an irritant which some people found in the first edition - that Cutler's retrospective sustenance of a developing British underground required that the exclusion/inclusion whims of the time be affirmed.

These examples indicate the way in which *File Under Popular* is bedded in a particular period and that it hardly extends to punk, nor to its aftermath and the diminution of rock music's perceived importance. The book does not aspire towards being a total history of the production, distribution and reception of popular musics, but does catch light from some passing moments; that these moments continue to captivate some of us provides its worth and some justification for its choices.

A.D.

Improvisation: its nature and practice in music

Derek Bailey, The British Library/National Sound Archive. 160p. PB £12.95.

ISBN 0-7123-0506-8

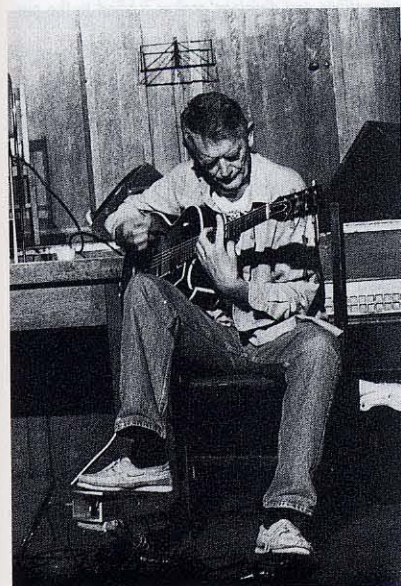


Photo © Z. V. Vasovic

Derek Bailey is an inspiration to all artists who plough the furrow of so-called 'marginalised art'.

Since the mid-'60s, Bailey has championed the cause of freely improvised music through thin and very thin. This new edition of his book, first written in the mid-'70s, formed the basis of the recent Channel Four series *On the Edge*, which explored the use and significance of improvisation in many types of music around the world.

It needs to be stated that this book is not a 'Teach Yourself', since such an endeavor would be a contradiction in terms; a book on learning to breath would be more logical. Nor is it an in-depth history of musical improvisation, that would run to countless volumes, and as Bailey points out (more than once) all music is born of improvisation. This is Bailey's real bone of contention; the validity of improvised music as opposed to composed music (i.e. The Establishment). An outsider may wonder (quite rightly) what all the fuss is about. Surely at the end of the day music is music? But musicians like Bailey have nailed themselves firmly to the cross on this one. For him and others like him, freedom of expression is of utmost importance - the freedom that allows the musician to venture beyond normal accepted parameters of what is regarded as 'musical', to defy the laws of harmony, the regulations of rhythm and the obligation of melody (or, give us a tune mate).

The first third of the book covers specific musics that utilise improvisation. There are brief chapters on Indian music, Flamenco, Baroque, Organ and good ole Rock & Roll. Since Indian music is a whole cultural tradition on its own, the two (too) brief chapters here function as a mere window into the wonders of the Raga - as Bailey points out, to the Indian musician improv is a way of life.

Breast-fed as I am on Rock music, I have to admit to some serious reservations about the 'Rock' chapter. As in the first edition there are some words of wisdom from Steve Howe, muso guitarist with the definitive bland conceptualist '70s combo, Yes. The chapter has now been supplemented with a conversation with Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead, the band who just didn't know when to stop. Is it me or is it the author, but I have never possessed an album by any of these people. I do however have albums by Faust, Henry Cow, Pere Ubu, Captain Beefheart, Brian Eno, Bill Laswell, King Crimson and of course Can, the band who were the rock improvisors.

The mid-section of the book investigates attitudes and developments in jazz and classical music towards the idea of improvisation and how it should be/could be used. The chapter *Jazz 2* concentrates on the 'New Wave' of Jazz that blossomed in the late '50s/early '60s. It uses extensive quotes by soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy, a musician whose own music evolved from 'trad' to 'Mainstream' and on into 'Free Jazz' courtesy of his exposure to Cecil Taylor and Don Cherry. Lacy was never a man to stand still. I particularly agree with his comment

'...Some people are of a progressive bent and some are not... (they) become obsessed with not just maintaining a tradition but with perfecting it...and that is progress for them. Other people want to beat down the walls to find some new territory'. It's no accident that *On the Edge* is a Lacy quote.

Much of the latter half of the book is really a personal investigation by Bailey into his own musical style and development, beginning with the 'group' Joseph Holbrooke and up to Company Week '91. This allows Bailey to concentrate on group improv, solo improv and improv in a classroom environment, based on conversations with musicians he has collaborated with over the years. There is an interesting discussion with Dutch percussionist Han Bennink on how he would use a whistling kettle to demonstrate unpredictable pitches to his students - 'If it doesn't work', says Bennink, 'you can always say it wasn't your cup of tea.'

For me, one of the most intriguing chapters is that given over to objections. This chapter deals mainly with the negative feelings towards improvisation by Gavin Bryars, who for three years worked with Bailey in Joseph Holbrooke. For any practitioner of the 'automatic', Bryars' doubts and scepticism are always worth considering and I'm sure most 'free' musicians would sympathise with the dilemma's raised. Like its predecessor this is a book that demands to be read and re-read by those interested in the radical side of music. For the uninitiated it would make an intriguing introduction to a much maligned and misunderstood form of music. For those already converted, it is an essential buy if you don't already possess the first edition.

JAS SHERRY

Cultural Studies

Lawrence GROSSBERG, Cary NELSON, & Paula A. TREICHLER (eds), Routledge, London 1992. 788pp. HB £40.00, PB £14.99

ISBN 0-415-90351-3

This book started out as a conference titled *Cultural Studies Now and in the Future* organized by the Unit for Criticism & Interpretive Theory at the University of Illinois in April 1990. It consists of 39 papers by a heterogeneous collection of authors, from many different positions in the world (geographically and otherwise), together with a useful introductory essay in which the editors attempt the rather protean task of describing what cultural studies is and is not.

The contributions themselves are hugely varied. For example, in *Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt*, Homi K. Bhabha produces the following prize example of pompous academic gibberish:

The linguistic metaphor opens up a movement of

contingency and ambivalence in the positioning of cultural and political identity that is neither teleological or dialectical. What is crucial is to work out a notion of arbitrary closure for cultural judgement and political agency that leads neither to 'relative autonomy' nor to an open-ended literal pluralism where... we must always be on the look out for marginalization without necessarily shifting the finitude of our final vocabularies.

Fortunately, most of the book is not written like this. Much of it is in fact decidedly unacademic in style. Which is of course perfectly in order, since many of the authors want to put a certain distance between themselves and the world of 'normal' academic discourse, with its scientific pretensions and its unspoken masculinist and eurocentric bias. And one of the book's most interesting features is that it subjects political, scientific and aesthetic 'texts' and 'truth-claims' to a ruthless deconstruction which lays bare some fairly horrific - and sometimes humbling - implicit and un-thought out goes-without-sayings. At the same time it gives a voice to some of those who live outside the mainstream of western intellectual society, i.e. most people. This latter was the stated aim of one of the founding texts of cultural studies, E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1966). Thompson's writes:

I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the obsolete handloom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity.

And yet cultural studies is a product of the academic world, or rather, something that grew up on its margins: the ambivalent world of the extramural class, the WEA, of Ruskin College, of Newbattle Abbey. The discipline's founders were themselves marginals in academe: Richard Hoggart with his background in a rich and unrejected working-class tradition; Stuart Hall, a black man from the 'colonies'; and Raymond Williams, an expert in border countries (country/city, working class/intellectual middle class, Welsh/English...). It retains the peculiar consciousness, neither fully attached nor completely detached, of the dweller-on-the-marches, the not-quite-belonging: hence its useful awkwardness. As to the subject matter of the papers, here is a small sample:

The perception of white people, or more accurately 'whiteness, in the black imagination (**bell hooks**);

The particular difficulties faced by Chicana women activists, where the dominated culture is itself more strongly masculinist than the dominating one (**Angie Chabram-Dernerseian**);

The cultural study of popular music (**Simon Frith**);

The events of 1968, with Enoch Powell as an ironic example of the slogan *L'imagination au pouvoir*

taking effect (**Kobena Mercer**);

The politics of representation in the Hungarian uprising of 1956 (**Anna Szemere**);

The (complicated) relation of black British people to the icons of British/English national identity (**Paul Gilroy**);

The relation between the complex of sensitivities loosely described as New Age, and official scientific culture (**Andrew Ross**);

The curious phenomenon of 'slash fandom', a completely female spin-off of *Star Trek* fandom which produces its own literature centred on the sexual relationship of Captain Kirk and Mr Spock (**Constance Penley**).

Douglas Crimp's essay, *Portraits of People with AIDS*, shows how not only the mass media (of which enough said) but also art photography, in the form of a much acclaimed MOMA show of Nicholas Nixon's photos of PWA (People with Aids), serves to categorize the latter as helpless and alone, but above all other than the spectator by their selection as specimens (critics compared them to medieval plague images, the memento mori, etc.; the subjects 'wear' the blotchy lesions of Kaposi's sarcoma like the attributes of martyr saints). There is a clear echo of WPA photos from the Thirties of poor Appalachian farmers. Both stem from the liberal desire to 'give a human face' to what otherwise - to those who live at a safe distance - is only a set of dry official statistics. But the result is an absolute barrier between the spectator and the object that is exposed by the camera. These images may elicit pity, but never solidarity. No reference is made to the social and public existence of the persons depicted. As images of 'the human condition' - i.e. mortality - they deny the reality of their sitters as individual human beings. And nothing is said of the fact that the great majority of PWA's in America, being poor, die not only of the HIV virus, but because they can't afford medical care. It is Brecht's question of what truths to tell. It's true that we all die; but it is also true that many people are living in misery and dying prematurely because of official neglect - and official homophobia.

On a more theoretical note, Ian Hunter, in *Aesthetics and Cultural Studies*, explores the matter of aesthetics seen as a 'practice of the self', an asceticism comparable to yoga or monastic discipline, involving a similar withdrawal from the 'secular' world into a life of continuous self-examination and self-development: but using literature and other artistic forms as one's instruments. Here, just as in traditional religious life, both the self and the 'world' are seen as 'fallen' from an original harmonious state; alienated and fragmented, in dire need of reintegration. This Fall gives rise to Culture, 'an ethical work (*Bildung*) on the being whose incomplete-

ness they have accepted as their own'. Withdrawal from the public sphere relativizes it and makes it possible to criticize it by means of aesthetic categories. Hence the 'statesman-artist': Coleridge, Arnold, Morris, Lukacs. Starting first with Schiller and eighteenth century German philosophy, and passing through Hegel (Marx's name is conspicuously absent from this essay), aesthetic practice was radically transformed in the late nineteenth century, when what had hitherto been 'the specialized pursuit of a deracinated elite' (Williams) became, ironically, part of the technology of government: first, in the setting up of public education systems, and later when 'culture' came to be seen as an object of State administration. This change was brought about not by aesthetic persons, but by administrative intellectuals for whom the 'moral condition' of the populace had become a matter of political import. Now the lower classes would also become 'practitioners of the self', seeing the self as something to be worried about and worked on. Thus they would be turned from untrustworthy savages into useful and collaborative civilized people - just as was happening out there in the further reaches of the Empire. This policy essentially continued until very recently, but under the present government in Britain (and elsewhere) another change is taking place, with culture (and not just cultural artefacts) being subjected to ruthless commodification, along with history (renamed 'heritage') - education, medicine, information - in which any criterion of value other than the purely economic is simply deemed not to exist. Hunter unfortunately does not go into this. What he does is to point up some of the limitations of the aesthetic, especially in its relation with the 'public sphere'. Aesthetic rejection of norms (as repression or determinism) makes purposive action impossible and legitimizes doing nothing. Its tendency to 'problematize events as symptoms of humanity's deepest alienations and divisions' makes it blind to the particular possibilities latent in these events.

The problem with aesthetic critique - and with cultural studies to the degree that it is still caught in its slipstream - is that it presumes to comprehend and judge other cultural regions from a single metropolitan point, typically the university arts faculty. To travel to these other regions though - to law offices, media institutions, government bureaux, corporations, advertising agencies - is to make a sobering discovery: they are already replete with their own intellectuals. And they just look up and say, 'Well, what exactly is it that you can do for us?'

Apart from the individual contributions, interesting though many of them are, there remains the more intriguing and instructive question: just what is cultural studies? The answer is that it is in principle impossible to answer. Cultural studies, you will be told, has neither a fixed area of study, nor any fixed method, norms of judgment, or final truth to propound. It is committed to a constant process of re-

evaluation and redefinition of itself; like an elementary particle, it will not be pinned down to any precise location. But you can say roughly where it's at. It has a history, starting with Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1963), and continuing through the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. It has a broadly marked out area of interest, viz. 'the entire range of a society's arts, beliefs, institutions and communicative practices'. Its motive: 'to identify and articulate the relations between culture and society' or 'between the symbolic and material domains... (neither being privileged over the other, but rather constituting) ... a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual' (Williams).

In many respects, cultural studies is quintessentially postmodern. It rejects all positivism, all claims to objectivity or value-freedom: 'a recovery project that imagines the objects it recovers to exist as fully self-contained and independent entities, knowable apart from their own time and the time of their recovery, is ... not part of cultural studies.' (It is

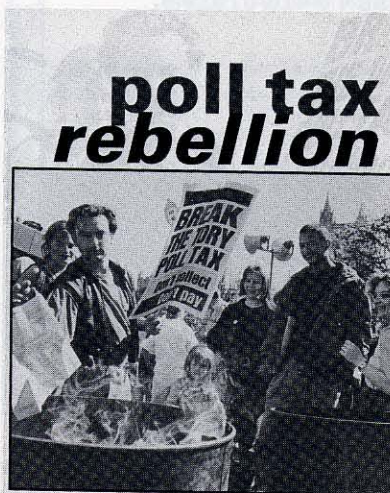
therefore not a social science.) Because it is committed to 'examining cultural practices from the point of view of their interaction with, and within, relations of power', its concerns are different from 'those of aestheticising, moralising or formalist kinds of cultural analysis'. (It therefore does not belong among the humanities, at least in the traditional sense.) It sees itself, in a suitably New Paradigm metaphor, as 'less a specific theoretical and political tradition or discipline than a gravitational field in which a number of intellectual traditions have found a provisional rendezvous'. It is committed to contextuality, critical of language and highly aware of the power structures embedded within it; suspicious of the individual; refusing - at least in theory - privileged explanations; using the method of bricolage... But it's not that hard to read between the lines, and find a very definite *grand récit*. The underwear bears the names of Marx and Gramsci sewn someway in the corners, and it often shows. The extracts quoted above, from **Tony Bennett's** paper *Putting Policy into Cultural Studies*, continue: '[The aim is] the development of ways of theorizing the relations between culture and power that will be of service to practical engagements with and within those relations'. Understanding the world in order to change it. In almost every essay you will find loaded words: progressive, hegemony, organic intellectual - whose production was once defined by Stuart Hall as the very purpose of cultural studies. And one final irony. Of the 44 contributors all but three at the most are university academics: traditional intellectual, I think Gramsci would have called them.

SIMON BROWN

Poll Tax Rebellion

Danny Burn, AK Press (Stirling) in association with Attack International (London) 1992. 202pp, Illustrated. Price £4.95.

ISBN 1-87317650-3.



danny burns

This book is an important history of the struggle against the Poll Tax. It is comprehensive, well researched and very optimistic in tone. What is particularly good about it is the amount of space given over to people involved in the anti-Poll Tax campaign at local level. And local activity is central to the theoretical thrust of the arguments about strategy and tactics, both in the fight against the Poll Tax itself, and the possibilities for the application of this strategy to other struggles against oppression and capitalism.

The majority of the book - roughly sections 2 to 5 - is a narrative on the campaign as it unfolded; its origins, arguments over strategy and tactics, descriptions of activity, successes and failures, and so on. This approach makes for good reading and not since Nan Milton's biography of John MacLean have I so much enjoyed commentary on behind-the-scenes political manoeuvrings. Sections 1 and 6 are more theoretical in nature, though the author is extremely successful in avoiding the strange politico-socio-economic-jargon-speak which can so often be discouraging.

For obvious reasons the story starts in Scotland, where in early 1987 **The Workers Party of Scotland** organised a series of meetings in Glasgow. This resulted in the formation of **The Anti Poll Tax Union**, with the aim of co-ordinating 'resistance to the Poll Tax across Scotland'. Matt Lygate and Paul Cockshott were involved in this group and around this time distributed copies of their pamphlet *The Poll Tax Nightmare*, which had a

significant influence over the programme 'later adopted by the movement as a whole in early 1988 (and 1989 in England and Wales).'

The campaign envisaged was to be organised locally in neighbourhoods and schemes/estates and was first put into practice in Maryhill, Glasgow. The central plank of this campaign was to 'organise for non-payment on the basis that people were called on to join a union.' This seems to have shown remarkable foresight, and ironically, makes the posturing of the other fringe left parties appear even more ridiculous than usual.

By late 1987 other groups had entered the fray. **Militant, Community Resistance** (based in Edinburgh) and organisations such as the **Revolutionary Democratic Group** (an offshoot of the **Socialist Workers Party**):

'In November 1987, Community Resistance held a conference on the Poll Tax at the Glasgow City Hall. This conference supported non-registration and non-payment.'

It was from this conference that the mass campaign grew and came to include a multitude of other groups, even the **Scottish National Party**. At this point a quote outlining the standpoint of Community Resistance seems appropriate as it is broadly similar to that of **Danny Burns** and the book overall:

'Community Resistance rebelled against the bureaucratic models of organisation inherited from the labour movement, these were seen as exclusive and alienating. Their focus was on talking to people and doing things at a local level.'

The experience of Scottish people in resisting the Poll Tax was not wasted: in England and Wales the movement grew as rapidly as it had in Scotland. This was all to the horror of the Labour Party and trade union officials, most of whom were still trying to peddle the ludicrous 'Stop It' campaign, though there were certain points when the trade union bureaucrats were prepared to pay lip-service to non-payment, if only to cover their own backs in career terms.

Everything (in terms of the Poll Tax at least) started to go disastrously wrong for the Tories in 1990. The level of resistance to the Tax was far greater than they had anticipated. A large minority of the law abiding citizenry of Scotland, England and Wales had become very angry indeed. It is in the description of this period - when the campaign had escalated to a point where people were burning their Poll Tax demands, organising mass demonstrations and occupations, and resisting the bailiffs and sheriffs - that the book really comes to life. This was the sort of activity that resulted in the following being printed in the *Glasgow Evening Times* in early 1991:

'Using tactics modelled on the South African townships, many areas have become no-go areas for

sheriff officers with literally hundreds of pairs of eyes on the look-out.'

The detailed description and analysis of the events at Trafalgar Square and in Brixton are essential reading for anyone interested in the truth about the 'riots'. The analysis of the organisation of the Trafalgar Square Defence Committee and of the role of the police is excellent. It is good to read a book in which there are accurate accounts of the police being caught committing perjury. A good deal of the description of court procedure in relation to non-payment is hysterically funny. Indeed, it is a book not without much humour, Neil Kinnock being a particular source of hilarity. It is amazing how he cannot resist the temptation to use the phrase 'toy town revolutionaries', which is supposed to describe everyone to his left (or, in other words, not as right-wing as he is). Good old Neil.

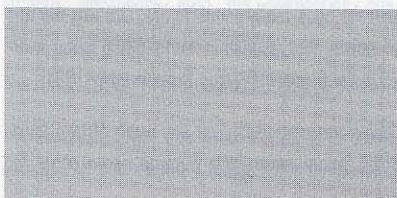
Humour aside, the book does deal with serious political matters and there are some wonderful photographs and illustrations. These communicate something of the atmosphere and sheer agony of the campaign.

The first and last sections are important in that section 1 reiterates the basic political arguments against the Poll Tax very clearly. It is necessary to keep these arguments in mind in order to have a perspective on what is being struggled for, and not see the fight against the Poll Tax as an end in itself. In the last section there is an analysis of the effects of the kind of political leadership which did or did not exert an influence over the campaign. And there is a broadening out:

'The activities of those who were not prepared to break the law were not undermined by the actions of those few who chose to throw fire bombs. Likewise, those who chose to leave Trafalgar Square peacefully were not tarnished by those who chose to fight back against the police attack. The occupations of the courts didn't prevent those who wanted to argue legal technicalities, and those who chose not to attend meetings but take action on their own didn't undermine the collective decisions of those who met in APTU's. The movement was not damaged by this diversity, it was strengthened by it. It created a feeling that everyone, from every walk of life, was involved in this campaign in some way, and that meant it was strong.'

But why have we got five more years? Even the Tories don't know.

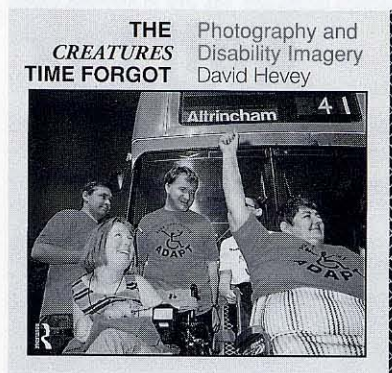
JIM FERGUSON



The Creatures That Time Forgot

David Hevey, Routledge, London 1992. 153pp, 57 illustrations, colour and black and white. £14.99.

ISBN 0-415-07019-8.



David Hevey's book *The Creatures That Time Forgot* is an articulate, challenging and at times humorous examination of the politics, theory and practice of representation. Although concerned primarily with images of disability, the issues raised are of wider significance and deal essentially with the structure of power relationships and the construction of meaning. Running through the text is an account of Hevey's own experience. It deals with his epilepsy, involvement with the disability movement and outlines the development of his interventionist photographic practice, but is more than anecdotal detail. Personal experience and intellectual analysis are synthesised to produce vibrant images that illustrate a process of empowerment from which many inferences can be drawn.

Devising new images and points of reference cannot be done without considering how meaning is constructed and located and Hevey develops his rationale through scrutinising a number of cultural forms and debates. The coercive 'tragedy principle' of classical Greek drama, the strategies and techniques of advertising and radical theatre are all examined. He envisages with the perspectives of theorists such as Burgin, Berger and Sekula and though he acknowledges that meaning shifts and is located in discourse and the context in which the image is placed, he refutes the notion that there are no inherent or universal meanings. The image is a complex of texts but can serve as more than a mirror for the surrounding discourse. If this were not possible, he argues, then mobilised political imagery could not exist on any level. Examples of his work which are provocative and original lend force to this argument.

Representing disability is problematic and images are rare outside the context of charity advertising. Diane Arbus is one of the few photographers to have undertaken the task. Hevey suggests that she uses

disability as a metaphor for social chaos and like most 'outsiders' projects her own fears of loss of control onto the impaired body.

Similar 'enfreakment' of the subject is frequently encountered in the imagery of charity advertising which is the target for Hevey's most uncompromising criticism. He exposes the hidden agendas of this oppressive imagery that promotes the caring face of capitalism but represents disabled people as powerless tragic victims. The disability movement categorically rejects this approach, which arouses fear and possibly pity but does little to improve the situation of the subject. Their perspective, that disability is located not in impairment *per se* but in social organisation and thought systems, is a direct challenge to the role played by charities in policing disability. It comes as no surprise that they feel threatened by the anarchic images created by disabled people themselves.

Dismantling oppressive imagery needs more than just a smile and suppressing the reality of being physically impaired in a disabling environment is not the way forward. Hevey's process of empowerment is based on giving disabled people the space to articulate their situation and in so doing to reclaim and be proud of themselves. The declared task and mutual aim is to explore theories of production and consumption, locate the subject politically in image and text and stimulate interactive relationships.

Considerable space is given to the discussion of theories and principles that will be familiar to anyone outside the mainstream, but the book is ultimately about imagery and the originality of Hevey's work derives from its integrity and declaration of intent. *Liberty, Equality, Disability - Images of a Movement* is the title of a series of posters that gives a vivid demonstration of Hevey's style and forms part of Camerawork's touring exhibition *The Creatures That Time Forgot*. The text and images represent a continuum of thought and action that contrasts starkly with the contradictions and monochrome visions of hell that are disseminated by charities. In this new and vital approach the subjects are not represented as confused or passive, they 'critically inhabit' the images which vibrate with colour and energy. The works also indicate how tricks of the trade can be appropriated or subverted. Hevey learned that the crumbling captains of industry could be presented in a positive light through choice of camera angle and the technique is now put to more creative use. He sets a 'trojan monkey' to infiltrate the 'Charity Camp' and shatters their negativity in a series of poignant and hilarious images. The book also includes work by **Jo Spence**, **Jessica Evans** and **Andy Golding**, providing further evidence that *The Creatures That Time Forgot* are on the march, angry, articulate and coming this way soon. Watch out for them.

JO McNAMARA

Storming the Reality Studio - A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Fiction

Edited by Larry McCaffery, Duke University Press, 373pp, £15.99.

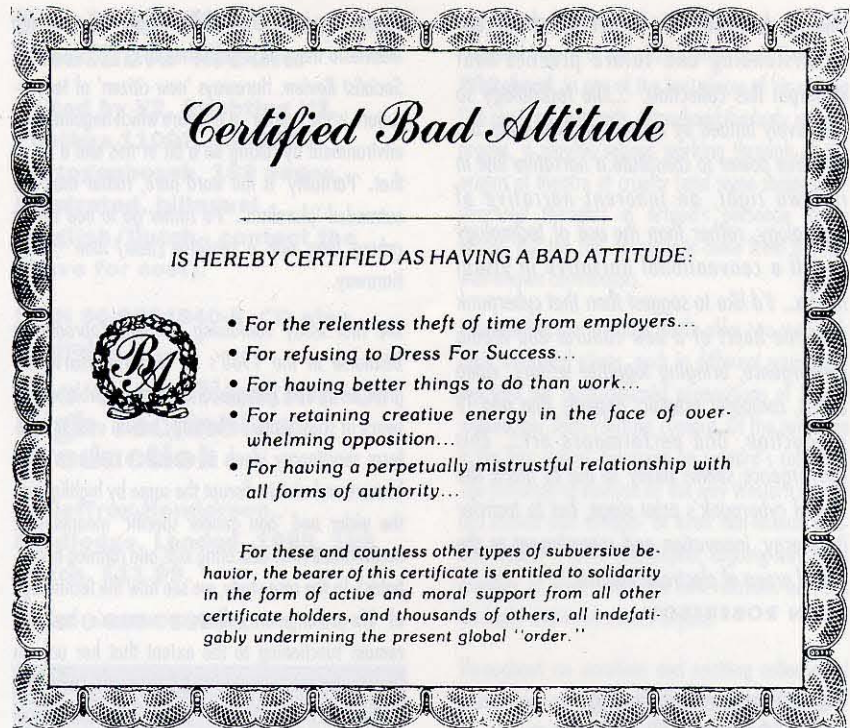
ISBN 0-8223-2.

The sf phenomenon of cyberpunk is widely recognised as having achieved a crucial identity with the publication of William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* in 1984. The history and the story of cyberpunk writing starts from this point, and as with any creative movement it is also the point at which it begins to fragment, diversify and mutate. However, it is relevant to state that Gibson's novel does provide the key cultural text to the whole notion of cyberpunk as a distinctive fictional form. This form was pursued in two other novels that developed into the *Sprawl* tryptich, *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*; however neither of these has the narrative vibrato of *Neuromancer*, the distinctive attributes about which Gibson says in an interview with Larry McCaffery in this volume: "It was a desperate quality that I think comes through in the book pretty clearly: *Neuromancer* is fuelled by my terrible fear of losing the reader's attention."

Despite its flaws this novel and its author casts a long and powerful shadow over the whole context of this collection of writing. Divided into two sections 'Fiction and Poetry', and 'Non-fiction', *Storming the Reality Studio* (a quote from William Burroughs' *Nova Express*) strives to map out a territory of cultural consensus between the realms of our 'contemporary condition. And it seems undeniable that this condition derives its unique status above all from technological change' (McCaffery) and the fringe areas of creative writing. Into this latter category are included familiar names like, Ballard, Burroughs, DeLillo, and Pynchon (non-cyberpunk fiction writers) as well as Baudrillard, Derrida, Jameson, Kroker, Leary and Lyotard.

The significance of the cyberpunk identity that denotes it as a movement is that the term was coined by Gardner Dozios in the Washington Post to describe a whole collection of writers along with Gibson: **Bruce Sterling, Lewis Shiner, John Shirley, Randy Rucker and Pat Cadigan.**

'The name burned into the world psyche, and the fiction of the cyberpunks began burrowing into every crack of the culture like a runaway



electronic virus.' (Steve Brown *Before the Lights Came On*). Each of these writers is featured within *Storming the Reality Studio* but the strength of their work is significantly weakened when compared to that of Gibson. Similarly, in the extensive critical essays included with the 'Non-fiction' section it is Gibson and particularly *Neuromancer* that is taken as a primary referent for analysis. The inclusion of what McCaffery calls 'quasi-cyberpunks' like Ballard, Burroughs and Pynchon provides a rich texture and vivid diversity in both narrative and subject, as well as highlighting the authors' distinctive style and form. This unfortunately does much to stress the frailty of most cyberpunk writing, a position taken up by several writers (Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., Veronica Hollinger and Brooks Landon).

It is McCaffery's notion that the cyberpunk writers echo a wider 'cultural condition' that provides the central axis to the structure of this collection. Seated within a broad constituency of concepts including Baudrillard's 'precession of simulacra', Cook and Kroker's 'hyperreality', Lyotard's 'postmodern condition', Derrida's 'deconstructionism' and Jameson's 'cultural logic of late capitalism', the humble writings of the key cyberpunk authors (again aside from Gibson) pale into trivia, overcome and overpowered by the sheer intellectual scale of many of these concepts and conditions. In one critical article **Darko Suvin** in *On Gibson and Cyberpunk sf* concludes by stating that maybe

we 'should simply stop talking about cyberpunk sf, that witty coinage of Dozios'? Perhaps it might be more useful to say that there is the writer William Gibson, and then there are a couple of expert PR men (most prominently Sterling himself) who know full well the commercial value of an instantly recognisable label, and are sticking one onto disparate products?'

In his introduction *The Desert of the Real*, McCaffery is very clear about his thesis '...the central topic addressed by this casebook is the way cyberpunk and other innovative forms of sf are functioning within the realm of postmodern culture generally: that is, the broader significance of sf's relationship to the complex set of radical ruptures - both within the dominant culture and aesthetic and also within the new social and economic media system (or *postindustrial society*) in which we live'. Recognition of this position has influenced the work and attitudes of many cultural producers over the past decade at least. The awareness of the changing climate for cultural production in a society driven by postindustrial criteria and the roller-coaster motion of market capitalism has created the need for constant novelty, transformation and added value. Technology has made these adaptations easily achievable, meaning however that innovation is still at a premium. The conclusion of **Brook Landon's** article *Bet On It: Cyber/video/punk/performance* addresses clearly this situation and forms a powerful

linkage between the elements of current understanding and future practice that underpin this collection: '...the technology so effectively limbed by cyberpunk fiction has the affective power to constitute a narrative line in its own right, an inherent narrative of technology, rather than the use of technology to tell a conventional narrative in visual media... I'd like to suggest then that cyberpunk is at the heart of a new cultural and media convergence, bringing together writers, video artists, computer graphics experts, film and TV production, and performance art... This convergence seems likely to me to mark the end of cyberpunk's print stage, but to transfer its energy, innovation and commitment to the global arena of electronic culture.'

ALAN ROBERTSON

Technoculture (Cultural Politics Vol 3)

Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (eds.) University of Minnesota Press, 1991. English text, pp 327. Illustrated b/w, \$39.95 cloth, \$15.95 pbk.

ISBN 0-8166-1932-8.

The thing about science is that you just never know how far you can trust it. One minute it's liberating free thought from the confines of the Medieval Church, and the next it's turning people into factory robots for the industrial revolution.

Technoculture is part of an emerging genre of new ways to think about the relation between science, technology and culture. Not wildly optimistic about the techno-utopia waiting just around the corner, nor hungover by the cultural pessimism of the 1980's. Its nearest critical relative is Philip Hayward's *Culture, Technology and Creativity in the Late Twentieth Century* published at almost the same time. But whereas the latter focuses on topics in art and culture (in the non-specialist meaning of the word) *Technoculture* broadens its scope to include everything from AIDS activism to computer hacking to Japanese comic books. And whereas Hayward's book of essays fragments the field into a description of the issues in each contributors specialist area, *Technoculture* attempts to be more prescriptive by asserting the opportunities that exist in the new hi-tech landscape for taking control of one's technological life as against defensively resisting the impositions of authoritarian control and bureaucratic dullness.

The general inspiration behind this approach is Donna Haraway's writings which introduce the

volume, particularly referencing her *Cyborg Manifesto* essay first published in a 1985 issue of *Socialist Review*. Haraway's 'new citizen' of technoculture is the cyborg - a creature which negotiates its environment by taking on a bit of this and a bit of that. 'Partiality' is the word here, rather than the outmoded 'pluralism'. 'I'd rather go to bed with a cyborg than with a sensitive [new] man', says Haraway.

The first essay *Containing Women: Reproductive Discourse in the 1980's* by Valerie Hartouni, gives us a first glimpse of how the double edged sword of science and technology can be used to reinforce reactionary ideals of women's status as child bearers and also to disrupt the same by highlighting the wider and 'non gender specific' meanings of motherhood (like educating kids and running households). In the case study, we see how the technology of life-prolongment allows a women's body to remain functioning to the extent that her unborn foetus can reach maturity 53 days after she has been declared brain dead. 'Brain Dead Mother has her Baby' shouts a newspaper headline - implying that thanks to hi-tech a woman does not even have to be alive nowadays to fulfil her role as a 'mother'. But wait a minute, it seems that scientists in Italy are developing an 'artificial womb' for incubating embryos outside a human being, female or otherwise, thereby theoretically releasing women from their function as 'foetal containers' and leaving them in a position to challenge all sorts of received identities to do with motherhood.

Similarly, in the second essay *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: The Evolution of AIDS Treatment Activism* by Paula A. Treichler, we see how a situation in which people with illness are the passive recipients of a medical management system of which they have little knowledge of, nor means of reply, is changed into a situation where groups like ACT UP have used collective action to force AIDS treatment centres to listen to their demands. The instrumentation and structures of a technologised health care system has provided society with a battlefield in which it can ultimately challenge the entire profit centred United States medical system. A good deal of the success of these ventures comes from a single minded determination on the part of activists to research and investigate until they have reached levels of technical literacy where they are able to confront governmental and scientific authorities on their own terms. This prompts the first call in the book for *technoliteracy* as a social and cultural agent.

In Andrew Ross' own contribution *Hacking Away at the Counterculture*, he examines the growth of the international digital communication networks for evidence of cultural fallout. The extended flow of information and connectivity suggests to some previous writers a gloomy picture of centralised control,

of communication and an increased potential for surveillance procedures. But this same technology of the feared 'panopticon' also gives rise to its own subculture of the computer hacker, breaking into corporate and governmental computer systems and releasing all manner of viruses, worms and other cyber bugs. But, are hackers really the serious political subversives of the cybernetic age, or are they just a bunch of bored school kids out looking for fun? Well, they're usually a bit of both, and the fact that the FBI have been storming the country raiding computer clubs and sending their members to jail seems to indicate that they have certainly succeeded in annoying someone.

Unfortunately the editors of *Technoculture* still feel they have to justify their existence by expending a lot of effort in the book trying to convince their colleagues in the world of cultural criticism that the impact of technology on culture and society is worth more time and study than an easy acceptance of the usual stereotyped views (e.g 'well, computers are all just military machines really, aren't they?'). This means that too much of the book is spent preaching to the converted - if someone has already read the book at any length this, you can be pretty certain that they are prepared to take the subject more seriously. Most people are already aware of the fact that technology is not wholly bad nor good, and that technoculture provides a rich field in which to develop contemporary cultural theories and strategies.

Technology is treated by most authors here as providing the mythological background or conceptual framework for studying a familiar range of human conditions manifesting themselves in new forms. Peter Fitting points out in *The Lessons of Cyberpunk* that the novels of William Gibson are not traditional or 'techie' Science Fiction, but appeal to a more general readership for their 'human interest' angle and social critique. Constance Penley presents the phenomenon of 'slash writing', a genre of Star Trek fan fiction which is premised around an imagined spacefaring romance between Captain Kirk and First Officer Spock (Kirk/Spock, K/S, or simply 'slash'). In this form of amateur writing, which is produced predominantly by female fans, the romantic and utopian aspects of science and technology provide the real content of the stories (the 'scary' and 'girl's own' action-adventure side as Donna Haraway describes it), rather than endless descriptions of gadgets, space ships and death rays. This cultural studies approach is successful here in deflecting the debate from worrying about formal and pedantic issues like what technology 'really is' or what is 'the nature of information', and encourages positive action and opportunism rather than lapsing into Post modernist apathy.

A broader definition of technology is often assumed here, using the Foucauldian model of a system of skills, instruments and organisations rather than hi-

tech electronics. This sometimes causes essays to strain their connection with the central theme of technoculture to an unrealistic degree, as they attempt to turn the subject towards their own area of expertise. This is most obvious with **Houston A Baker Jr** who contributes almost a prose poem on the history of Rap music, ending with an unconvincingly written anecdote of how he taught Shakespeare to a class of tough street-wise kids with the help of his Public Enemy tapes.

The last essays in the book deal more with writers experiences in the art and culture area of technoculture, and give some pointers as to how to take an active part in 'negotiating' your way through the new wired-up digital world. The producers of *Processed World*, the West Coast (of America) magazine that has carried on a campaign against the horrors of clerical work in the new automated office since 1981, make the ambiguities of cultural and political resistance clear:

'Rebel office workers ... work as little as possible. Their revolt takes the form of on-the-job disorganizing - absenteeism, disinformation, sabotage. They seldom view as worthwhile either the risk or the effort involved in creating a worker's self-defense organization. Moreover, rightly or wrongly, they believe that most workers, who identify more with their jobs, also identify with management. As a result, the rebels tend to be as alienated from their co-workers as they are from the boss.'

And:

'For us the contradiction lies in favouring workplace organizing on the one hand, while on the other hand advocating the abolition of work.'

Their office worker readership obviously did not feel able to make the same response as the AIDS activist groups in the earlier essay, perhaps also because they did not feel that their lives hung in the balance. But if a large proportion of college graduates continue to find themselves working as 'information managers' in the future, then the long term *quality* of life becomes a more major concern. Utopian ideals such as *Processed Worlds* abolition of office work are echoed in various forms elsewhere in this volume, but the fact that such ideals - the 'Athens without Slaves' argument - are now to a large extent practicably realisable, puts further pressure on 'cultural workers' to rise to the challenge. As artist **Jim Pomeroy** points out, maverick uses of technology and data are more effective now than turning back to the hand-crafted back-to-nature approach. Throw away those brushes, unpack those VDUs, and get *technoliterate*.

RICHARD WRIGHT

Book for the Unstable Media

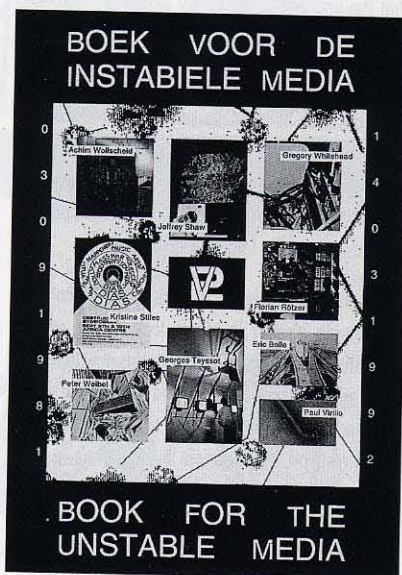
Edited by **V2, Stichting V2, Postbus 11007, 5200EA s'-Hertogenbosch. 169 pages, illustrated, bilingual (English/Dutch - contact the above for cost).**

ISBN 90-9004840-5. CD also available.

The Globalisation of High Technology Production

by **Jeffrey Henderson, Routledge, London, 1989, 198 pages. £11.99.**

ISBN 0-415-06076-1



From the home town of Hieronymus Bosch, a town about the size of Wigan to judge by the map, comes the **V2** media group, heralds of *Unstable Media*. Instability is the condition of the moving image and recorded sound, as opposed to the stabilities of print and painting. Most of all, according to the lead essay, the instability of the image is due to the interaction between medium and audience. Once a passive relation, now an active one.

This is poor history, and all too recognisable as manifesto-speak. But the first pages of this collection are the only weak spot, and even their over-enthusiasm gradually, in retrospect, turns into a symptom of a not entirely self-induced delirium. After squatting a town-centre warehouse in '82, **V2** have provided exhibition and debating space for artists at the cutting edge of media arts. This book is a product of that endeavour, a tribute to their tenacity. It is also self-published, so needs support.

There are some famous names, the ubiquitous **Paul Virilio** contributes a succinct essay on nanotechnol-

ogy; **Peter Weibel**, a knotty musing on the technological impact of uncertainty theorems; **Gregory Whitehead**, in one of the best pieces of his writing I've read, on radio arts, Artaud and the body without organs, a playful/serious working through of the origins of theatre of cruelty (and some major post-structural thought) in Artaud's personae of Le Momo. But the real revelations come from the less well-known contributors.

Florian Rotzer and **Eric Bolle** offer two outstandingly well-read pieces, each in different ways dealing with the postmodernist propositions of French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard. Of the two Bolle is the less critical, focussing on Lyotard's collection *The Inhuman* to analyse on the way Western society has moved into an anti- or even non-human position. Rotzer is more circumspect, arguing through a complex of ideas about the new relations between the body and its electronic organs.

Throughout an excellent and exciting collection, I found two constant and recurring problems - problems for me at least. The first is the simpler of the two. Marshall McLuhan's basic set of premises seem still to be the dominant paradigm here, the major set of spectacles through which human history is observed. Over and again, technology is credited with changing the human world, but without a sense that it's the humans who make technology too (though not under conditions of their own choosing). Over and again, the media are prosthetic gadgets for extending the range of the human sensorium. And below all this, the great American myth of the global village, media democracy brought about through multinational corporations.

Which is where this problem meets the other: the mythic 'We' of postmodernism. When people write about new media and the cultures that go with them, they sink into a slack use of language they wouldn't use in terms of music or films or poetry. They talk about how 'we' 'now' live in a world in which... But 'we' don't. Only some people do, some very, very few relatively wealthy people. No homeless, no poor, few women, few people in the colonised world, the immiserated debt-slaves of triumphal capitalism.

The absence of a 'we' to which people like the authors of the **V2** collection, *Variant* readers and myself might belong is addressed in **Jeffrey Henderson's** fine book on the political economy of computer manufacture. Starting from a razor-sharp critique of Frobels' New International Division of Labour (NIDL) thesis, Henderson builds a political analysis of the international organisation of chip manufacture from Singapore to Santa Clara, Silicon Valley to Silicon Glen. He turns attention to the use of unskilled, juvenile and women's labour for almost all manual jobs - using the lack of union organisation and the weight of patriarchy to help control a workforce with, after tendonitis and eyestrain, a terrifyingly short working life. Meanwhile, from

Malaysia to Livingstone, top technical and engineering jobs are the province of the educated boys. A state-run higher education system, in Taiwan or Heriot-Watt, provides the labour without Motorola or NEC ever having to pay for it.

The wealth of empirical data, and its careful structuring in a theoretically-informed discussion of the structure of a major global industry, make this a model of political economic thought, and I would think vital reading for people, who like myself, want desperately to understand the emergence of a global electronic culture. First, we must understand where these machines come from - and they do not spring fully formed from the minds of Norbert Wiener or Steve Jobs. The machines are not innocent. And their builders, the nameless thousands working in the semi-automated plants of the Pacific Rim and Scotland, are rarely those 'we' mean when 'we' write about the brave new world 'we' are entering.

On the other hand, Henderson does miss out, as he must, the intriguing difference between computer/electronic products and more familiar bits of consumer machinery. Unlike a fridge or a microwave, a computer, a camera, even a typewriter is a tool, a force of production. It's that paradox which creates one of the huge internal contradictions of capital: the urge for profit leads to giving away the tools for fighting against it. It's at that level that the work of V2 becomes important. Somehow it will be necessary to address both ends of this equation.

SEAN CUBITT

Way Out: Comics

Derek the Dust Particle, and its sequel *Bring Me The Head Of...*, by **Perry Natal** and **Frank Key** are ostensibly for children, but come via alternative/small press distributors Counter Productions. They also come with the endorsement of Harry Mathews, and contain the same kind of deadpan references to an invented culture, that bit more overtly weird than ours, as does some of Mathews' work.

Derek wanders into strange adventures in space and time respectively, leaving odd customs such as 'Chip Pie' and 'Poke the Lemon', to be preserved back home at Mrs Tureens guest house. It's a kind of surreal Coronation Street, reminiscent of Alan Moore's *Bojefries Saga*, and amongst the cheap gags about Slough, there are flashes of inspiration. Everyone's favourite bit would surely be different, but Mr Switchpout's belief that people would soon be talking in birdsong certainly appealed to me, "Then we

can learn how to fly", he would say pointedly'.

While not fitting my definition of a comic (interdependent text and visuals), some effort has been made to ensure that the text and pictures on facing pages correspond. Being positive, one might say that Frank Key's drawings have a freshness often lacking in more developed work, and the homogeneous Rotring lines occasionally gel into interesting moire patterns. On the other hand, there's a bit of a reliance on cartoon cliches. Also, for me, the drawings in the second book lack the charm of the first.

Their value as children's books lie partly in their lack of moralising and covert socialization, but it's for their celebration of imagination for its own sake that the unofficial - but surely expected - audience of adults will appreciate them.

Mauretania Comics also depicts a world different from our own in ways we can only glimpse. **Paul Harvey** and **Chris Reynolds** met whilst studying in Stoke-on-Trent, and their comic is influenced by the special feel of that city, which they compare to the paintings of De Chirico and Hopper.

While certain themes and elements recur, creating a *Mauretania* identity, a closer look at the current issue shows that the individual stories are quite varied. *England's Last Summer*, and *Tracy Rand* create a powerfully present place and time, to which characters respond, for example by travelling in their imaginations to other places and times. *Anna Nonstrats Story* and *Greg Summers: Footballer*, on the other hand, present recit style potted histories, but leave us with more questions than answers.

Harvey and Reynolds have also created a 'corporate' drawing style of long shadows and solid blacks, like photographs taken on a very bright day, but again, it leaves them plenty of room to manoeuvre. Looking at Reynolds' pieces, *Tracy Rand* uses a series of half-page evocative ink landscapes seen through car windows in the evening, while *The Anna Nonstrats Story* uses matchbox sized near ideograms.

Mauretania often features other contributors, presumably because their work has similar concerns or qualities, and that's certainly true of **Garry Marshall**, who - having completed his long-running serial in *Atomic* - applies his 'ink noir' rendering to a Harvey story. The main criticism one might make of *Mauretania* is that it has not changed much over these fourteen issues, but that becomes invalid if we see it as a single continuous work adding layer upon layer to our perception of *Mauretania*.

Carol Swain has also appeared in *Mauretania*, as

well as publishing her solo collection *Way Out Strips*. While her charcoal renderings are distinctly her own, she shares some of the same dream-like qualities, and fascination with people's relation to their environment. Harvey and Reynolds have coined the term 'psychetecture', but Swain's work is more 'sociotecture'. The idea of an underclass with feelings of 'nothing to do and nothing to lose' permeates in the current issue. *Dum Dum Day* begins with three unrepentant youths being led away by the police, and flashes back to how they hit the jackpot on a 'Goldmine' machine, and decided to make it a night to remember.

In *B Movie*, girl meets boy in the Trailer Park where she lives. Unfortunately his folks can't find work, and in the morning he finds they have re-materialised elsewhere. There are lots of incidental details along the way, like the flashbacks to the different places he has lived, and strange incidents like driving through the desert looking for dogs to shoot. The actual text is minimal, with the real work being done in the pictures: there are lots of 'silent' panels, and sequences of people just walking and talking. The sense of a relationship forming between the characters, for example, is conveyed almost subliminally, through body language and the choice of 'shots'. Like most of the best art, it is hard to imagine *Way Out Strips* in any other medium.

GRAHAM JOHNSTONE

Mauretania no. 14 is available for £1.60 inc. p&p from 5/20 Simonside Terrace, Heaton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE6 5JX. Back issues are also available. Their exhibition *Psychetecture* is touring, and may be available to interested venues.

Way Out Strips is available from 109 Southen Close, Southend Green, Hampstead, London NW3 2RE/ Issues 3 and 4 are £2.00 each inc. p&p.

Derek the Dust Particle and *Bring Me the Head Of...* are published by Aporia Press and are available from Counter Productions, PO Box 556, London SE5 0RW for £2.00 and £2.50 respectively. Also available is *Bootdog* by Perry Natal and Claudia Schmidt (£3.50), with *The Bitter Tears of Derek...* due Winter 92/93.

A range of small press comics are available from the small press table at Glasgow Comics Marts. Future dates are Saturday 15th August and 14th November 1992, at City Halls, Candleriggs, Glasgow. Doors open 12 noon.



Carol Swain 'Dum Dum Day' from *Way Out Strips*

R E V I E W S

Some Recent Art in Glasgow

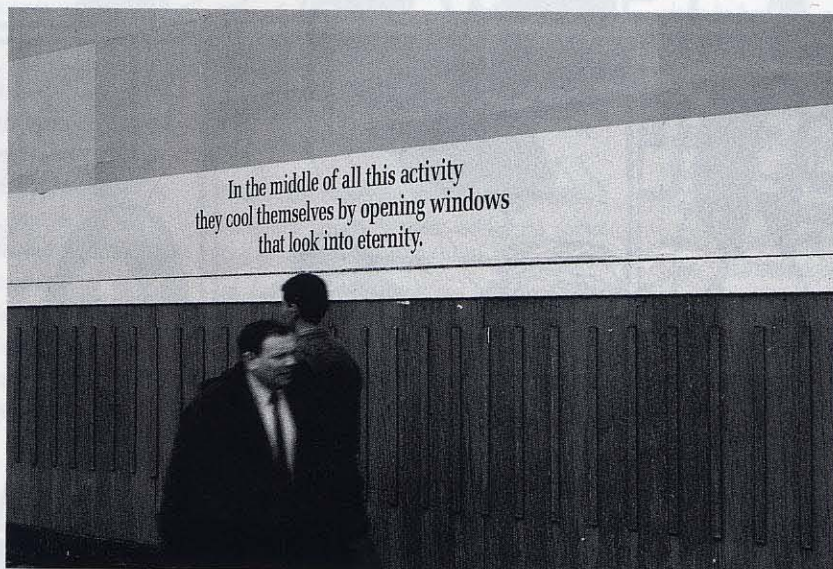
A challenging approach characterised much of the visual arts in Glasgow during May 92: the means much favoured - the installation, use of text, photography, pre-fabrication, use of symbols or found materials etc - can be consumed by a public already well-versed in such techniques so present in media saturated urban environments. Of course the viewer may not instantly know what use to make of the stuff that assumes the mantle of art, but it can be proposed that art can bring about a situation where problems are created and displayed which are not dependent upon 'solutions' to be appreciated.

At Transmission a series of three works by four artists juxtaposed analytical formalism with combative imagery in a subtle presentation dramatically enlivened by an installation of strip-lights by **Simon Starling** and **Paul Maguire**. These showed cubic forms in flattened perspective, and in the works the artists have accepted the limitations of the material as a positive factor in the structuring of the work which acknowledged possibilities within self-imposed boundaries. **Michael McDonough's** cibachromes of revolver holsters undid much drama normally associated with guns. The finely observed detail of the yellow stitching in the leather roughly outlined the outer mould of the gun's body and drew an inor-

dinate amount of attention. This underlined the secretive nature of the (covered) object of fascination, anthropomorphic of a part of the human body. Weaponry, often displayed in media events as savage modern trophies, signifies violent power held by those in authority to battle those in crime, however, due to the accessibility of modern weaponry to the general public, transgressions do occur.

Calculated photographs occurred again in the details of sandbagged and taped windows taken recently by **Donald Urquart** in Zagreb, at a time of the build-up to war. Showing war as foremost a state of anticipation gripping society through ceaseless mental and physical preparations; as formal arrangements the photographs are directives in themselves, gridded pre-meditations, the plan before action. The deliberation over the attention to subtle detail contrasted with the image we often associate with war, that of the damaged or destroyed body.

In the latest works by **Ken Currie** on show at Glasgow Print Studio, the crowd rarely assemble in



Roderick Buchanan, BBC Billboard Project

celebration. In an alternative world landscape resembling post-war Europe 'the wall' has fallen victim to entropy or national disaster and stagnation permeates. *New Democracy* portrayed a lynching, in *The Children Devour Their Revolution* rope ties up a victim's face revealing the lines of future scars. Individualising the expressions of the drawn subjects seems a growing formal concern, but all are characterised as down-trodden or just plain evil and are clichés in action. As in children's drawings, ugliness is fun, obese white bodies are given the role of symbolic evil's henchmen and physical impurity equates with ideological corruption - intriguing metaphors for our time. Pure fiction?

As part of the Discovering Columbus season, the Tramway showed two installations commissioned and completed in an unenviable short space of time,

with **David MacMillan's** work throwing up some contradictory ideas (and a tug of the forelock to the sponsor Gold Bier) in its realisation. *Hunger for Gold* takes the travels of Columbus as an historical starting point and ends with a giant football representing World Cup aspirations, itself now reaching the Americas, plotting the rise of super-national ideals through symbols of cultural/economic groupings. The quest towards world domination and also the desire for unrestrained victory that gold represents is always a problem, but each of the six banners were only reflective representations of power giving less than bargained for. As we are patently aware of the look of totalitarianism, the mere reshewing of known symbolism does not imply critique and the artists intentions remain unclear (it's a characteristic of much art today that the intentions are concealed). The lack of resolution in the work was not a fault in itself as it did remark on continuing relevant events, Columbus' Anniversary, the Rio Summit, The Olympics and so on, but it delivered an unquestioned history, the 'addresser' and the 'recipient' are avoided in its generalised overview. Ultimately the work could happily reside in any global super-structured event, like Expo '92, as a celebration of dominance.

Sharing formal similarities but having intentional differences, **Matthew Dalziel's** installation *Blue and White* sat more comfortably in the smaller Tramway exhibition space and emanated a pleasant feeling. The presentation of physical phenomena, the three

hanging white sheets billowing slowly over the beautiful blue ovals, was well executed but directionless. A peculiar relaxation could be experienced gliding out from the work, the apparent breezy carelessness coming from time spent watching the fans push the sheets from left to right and back again, as you waited for nothing, the blue and the fresh air sedated.

A developing philosophical approach could be found in *Access* at the Collins Gallery. An installation in two spaces is - as in **Jim Buckley's** recent work most notably at The Collective Gallery last year - involved with the presentation of architectural images encased within sculptures, or installations with panoptical references, however, the aggressive fortress-like exteriors of previous work have now been pulled back into the light-filled imaginary interiors. Now all being 'inside', the viewer's decision to

observe through the spy-holes involved something more fundamental, sinister even, than mere curiosity.

Initially kept at bay by the cold sparseness of the installation in one half of the work - a room with nine unpolished brass plates with centred spy holes - the viewer 'actively' engaged with the work by pressing small buttons, which illuminated the architectural 'sites' photographed and seen as transparencies 'behind' the plates. The slow depression of the pneumatic buttons would switch off and the viewer would be plunged into darkness. In what may now seem an overuse of a visual effect caused by the ordinary spy-hole device, the installation may prove to be an important variation in Buckley's objectives. Eschewing site-specificity for the creation of new spaces in which controlled viewing in some way parodies the function and presumed passive behaviour within galleries, *Access* presented us with images of places and sites we may never visit. No geographical information was given, the alienating controlled space and the golden room with the glowing pictures points us in the direction of the general human condition.

Meanwhile up the road beside Buchanan Street Bus Station a passerby scrawled 'Call This Art' over the text produced by **Roderick Buchanan** as part of the BBC Billboard Project. Unlike the other billboards in the project, someone had recognised the text as 'Art' and acted accordingly. Not being mistaken as advertisement is partly due to the artist's understanding of the high recognition potential the public has of the tricks of advertisers. The text 'The sole earthly criterion of whether an enterprise is right or wrong is its success' is quoted from Mein Kampf and is one of five (one of which the BBC censored) placed in the area of the billboard normally reserved for the government health warning in cigarette advertising. Also utilising the same typeface as the warnings it questioned responsibility and asked for alternatives in the machinations of the public image developers.

Each text sat below the pale grey backing paper often used on unlit billboards, empty of the conventional expression it acted as a primer for the words. Showing the space as blank dominant object, like a television switched off (and then you notice all the furniture is arranged around it) the work questions the designed identity of things that surround us everywhere but which we take for granted. In our hunger for images we allow a dosage of propaganda with advertising conveying, as one the texts suggested, 'a proven acceptability'.

Whilst two of the works were quotes, two other texts were formed by Buchanan and had a violent emphasis which acknowledged an unsanctioned side to streetlife by complicating the accepted use of these sites, dramatic grey renderings that were not the usual demanding urgencies of normal texts in

advertisements but still resembles the voice of authority.

Concentrating on local issues at hand rather than the development of the 'universal' may politicise the process of making art (or the local may politicise the view of the universal?). After the recent General and Local Council elections **Euan Sutherland's** work at the Bay Tree Cafe (a west-end vegetarian haunt) was once more another timely reminder that cultural displays via party politics are sometimes deceitful if not corrupt. The cafe walls, usually reserved for images of sunny Greece were adorned in a checkered pattern with a series of green screen prints blanketing even the ceiling. Reworkings of pre-existing signs and typefaces in twisted combinations,

like face-lifts gone wrong, parodied the image of the ruling councils. In this 'one party state' even the electoral system is no longer the method of displaying displeasure at the alternating meekness and aggression of both national politics and the local situation. Socialism no longer equates with these 'public servants', our elected politicians in Glasgow, something we must keep reminding ourselves as they continue to announce that "now or next year you'll have to pay" (the poll tax). It is these and no doubt future proclamations that are so much meat to Sutherland's sometimes intentionally blunt scalpel.

CRAIG RICHARDSON



Michael McDonough at Transmission Gallery



Euan Sutherland at the Bay Tree Cafe

Pepe Espaliu and Rose Finn Kelcey at Edge 92.

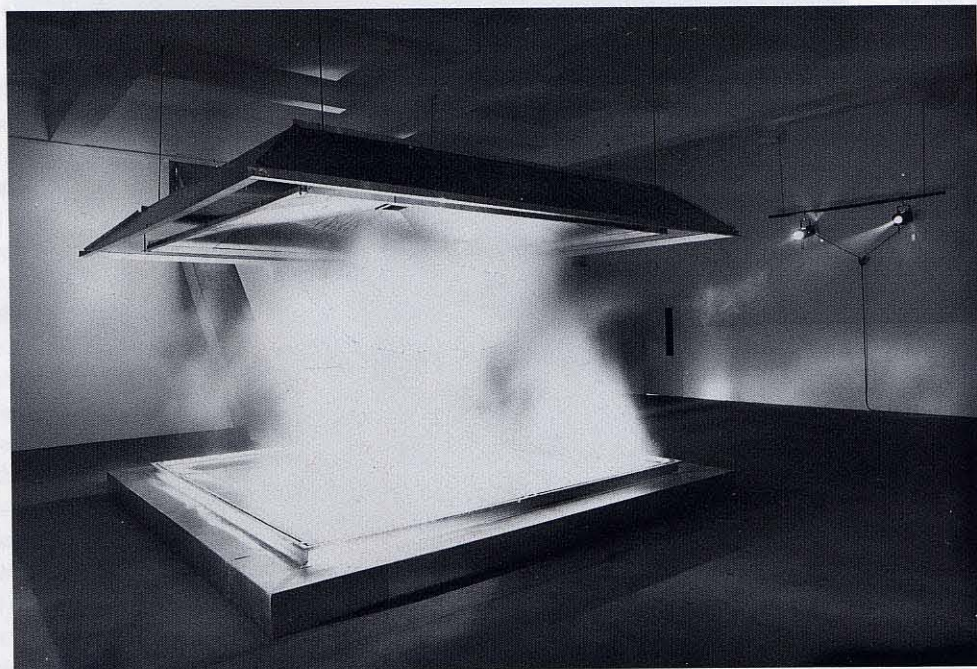
Aside from the problems of presenting an international biennale of innovative art, *Edge 92* managed to surface almost unscathed from the disorganisation, offering the 'interested' perusing public a chance to see a mixed and sometimes coherent ensemble of artists from across the globe. Although some artists left early and others failed to show their work due to technical difficulties, many took advantage of a plethora of empty sites around London. Artists from Spain, Canada, Australia and more, found spaces in churches, old urinals, part of Smithfield market, as well as the more common gallery environment to place their work. How the artists reacted provided much of the 'entertainment'.

space. Using a venue that is still a 'sacred house of God', Espaliu, by referring to the parable of doubting Peter, illustrates that a crisis of faith is a real and worrying problem. It is perhaps more poignant that Espaliu's 'Spanishness' allows his own address at 'religious identity crisis bashing', more power and relevance. The Spanish have a more complex religious legacy to think about, ever since the days of the so-called 'discovery' of the Americas, which was disguised as a religious crusade. More recently, since the end of the decades of anal conservatism during the Franco era, Spain has enjoyed a new found spiritual freedom, but remains unsteady in its direction. Not surprisingly then Espaliu prods a few witty asides at his own self-doubt using humour as the scapegoat of the truth.

Espaliu used the space with the minimum of effort and maximum simplicity. The body of water flowed

cold air passed over it and came into contact with the heat, it condensed into steam. The steam then rose slowly, pulled upwards by an extractor fan hidden in the top steel section.

Watching the steam cloud was both a tranquil and an unnerving experience. This flexible natural product was a calming concept but its path was totally controlled by the extractor fan. The uncontrollable was being unnaturally controlled, so much so that the creator need not even be present. Is this Kelcey's own wish to control what she thought was impossible before? Has she become bored of playing with the elements and turned to producing her 'home grown' version? While her previous 'wind-blown objects', such as flags, the 1970's relied on the changeability of the weather, Kelcey has turned the situation around. Before, the flags were controlled by the ele-



Rose Finn Kelcey
at Chisenhale Gallery

Photo: Hugo Glendenning

With Spaniard **Pepe Espaliu**, religious themes came naturally from using a disused church as a venue.

Taking the area around the altarpiece, Espaliu constructed his own artistic shrine. In direct response to images of Christ walking on water, with Peter attempting the same but failing, Espaliu filled the altar area with an inch of water and placed kneeling cushions taken from the pews at intervals within the ten feet rectangular space. The altar stood slightly elevated, surrounded by bannisters - in front, stood rows of empty pews. With a humorous stab at the biblical, Espaliu literally offers Peter another chance to follow Jesus, this time using the kneeling cushions as stepping stones.

Reducing an important and well known religious story to boyish trickery may say more about Espaliu's disdain for religion than a willingness to react to the

gently down to a channel at the front of the altar. The constant flow was neatly symbolic not only of the durability of faith but the transience of mortal man.

Rose Finn Kelcey's use of space paid far less attention to the confines of the gallery. Instead she concentrated on the object created to work as a piece with no direct link with the space it inhabits. Her installation in the sparse whitewashed setting of Chisenhale Gallery was a self-contained unit that operated unaided. She made a bizarre but serene work using steel and steam. Like the steam being produced, the work was almost intangible, ever-changing and unpredictable. Sandwiched between two layers of steel waffle-like structures hung a twisting body of steam slowly spiralling upwards, glowing and glinting as it passed through tubes of artificial light. Cold air was pumped into the bottom steel section which held water heated by filaments. As the

ments: rain, sun, wind etc. Now Kelcey has a machine to produce her own weather. But turning the weather 'inside out' has its limits. She is confined to a restricted space.

Like someone snatching a segment from the Niagara Falls to take home, this mixing of the natural and the quasi-industrial felt incomplete. If we felt strangely secure watching this hazy spiral with the sound of fans resonating through the gallery, yet there is a worrying tendency to feel safe with man-made products. Despite its ability to confuse the senses, Kelcey's installation left the viewer looking at real clouds with a renewed curiosity.

Rose Finn Kelcey was at the Chisenhale Gallery, London. Pepe Espaliu was at St. Paul's Church, London.

SIMON GRANT



SCOTTISH POWER